

Isabelle Dolezalek

Arabic Script on Christian Kings

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Ingrid Baumgärtner, Stephan Conermann
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Arabic Script on Christian Kings

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from Norman Sicily

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Note on Dating and Transliterations

Dates are consistently given in the Gregorian calendar. Unless indicated otherwise, Hijri dates have been converted for the sake of comparability.

Transliterations from the Arabic follow the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies and do not indicate grammatical case endings (*i'rāb*). This excludes transcriptions cited from other authors, which have been adopted without modifications. Place names and names of dynasties are rendered using their English equivalents.



Preface

Inscribed textiles may never have crossed my mind had it not been for an inspiring conversation with Almut Höfert in Basel. My ensuing enthusiasm for precious textiles in the medieval Mediterranean led to a doctoral dissertation, the origin of this book, which I completed at the Freie Universität Berlin in May 2013 and which was awarded the Mediävistenverband (Medievalists' Society) prize in 2015. Being granted the possibility of publishing this book in the interdisciplinary series of the Medievalists' Society is a privilege for which I particularly thank the editors Ingrid Baumgärtner, Stephan Conermann and Thomas Honegger.

I was most fortunate to be able to study Sicilian textile inscriptions under the auspices of the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), within the immensely stimulating frame of the Emmy Noether Junior Research Group 'Kosmos/Ornatus: Ornament in Persia and France c. 1400 in Comparison.' My work has hugely benefited from regular discussions with my colleagues in the research group, Vera Beyer, Simon Rettig and the members of the monthly colloquium, and from their critical scrutiny of my ideas. I owe endless gratitude in particular to Vera Beyer, the director of the research group and my doctoral supervisor, for her interest in my work, her unfailing encouragement and support even long after the end of the ornament project. I would also like to thank Regula Forster, my second supervisor, for her kind and patient advice on Arabic issues. Being invited for two extended stays at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence was a particular pleasure for me and for this I would like to express my gratitude to Gerhard Wolf. Regula Schorta allowed me to stay and carry out research at the Abegg Foundation in Riggisberg. Both made me feel very welcome and I was grateful for the chance to discover these inspiring institutions. I would like to thank Hannah Baader from the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Birgitt Borkopp-Restle and her colleagues from the University of Bern, as well as Avinoam Shalem (Columbia University) for discussing important aspects of my work. Svenja Kauer, Joana Mylek and Cornelia Weber have been of invaluable practical help in the completion of the book.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Anna Bücheler, Gero Dolezalek and Edward Street, who have invested so much of their time and patience in reading and commenting on my drafts. I would still be working on the manuscript had it not been for my family's backing and Beatrice Dolezalek-Lauw's fabulous grandchild-sitting. Last, but by no means least, I want to thank Cornelius Richter for his loving support and unfailing humour in the final stages of both the dissertation and the book.

Since the completion of my research, many new publications have appeared in the fields of textile and ornament studies, epigraphy, the history of Norman Sicily, and transcultural and Mediterranean art history. I have aimed to integrate some of these studies in this slightly revised version of my dissertation, but hope that I will be forgiven for having had to omit many others.

Introduction

There is an expression of wonder in the faces of most visitors to the imperial treasury in Vienna who see the large Norman mantle kept there (Fig. 1). Spread out in its dimly lit case, the vivid crimson and fine gold embroidery of this piece, almost nine hundred years old and known for centuries as the coronation mantle of the Holy Roman Empire, unfailingly attract the gaze and invite closer scrutiny. Colours turn into shapes as you draw closer: fierce lions are subduing camels. Camels? And then, at the bottom, a peculiar undulating line provokes bewilderment... Is that Arabic? An Arabic inscription on a Christian king's mantle?



Fig. 1: Mantle of Roger II on display in the Imperial Treasury, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna.

Inscriptions, probably more than any other form of ornament, lend themselves to associations with specific cultural spheres which are easily defined – or so it seems – by language boundaries and, in the particular case of Arabic writing, commonly related to the geographical spread of Islam. So, far from being a simple reaction, a visitor's spontaneous feeling of surprise can be seen as the expression of a tension between conventionally established concepts of cultural boundaries and the unconventional, boundary-transgressing aesthetics of this twelfth-century object from Sicily. The astonishment results from various preconceptions based on established notions of cultural and religious identity and the rigid separation, at least in theory, between Christian and Islamic visual cultures.

This book focuses on Arabic textile inscriptions in circulation in the medieval Mediterranean and beyond, as an example of an ornament that is 'transcultural' in the sense that it transgresses conventional boundaries. Through the case study of the royal garments with Arabic inscriptions from Norman Sicily, I propose to investigate

the functions of this type of ornament using various contextual and methodological frames. My contextualising approach, drawing on various historical disciplines and encompassing historiographical considerations, Latin and Arabic court cultures, and Sicilian local concerns, is a means of highlighting idiosyncrasies and emphasising the choices that underlay the use of Arabic textile inscriptions at the Sicilian court. It sheds light on the context-related variability of the functions and meanings of this particular ornamental motif and thereby aims to counter universalising interpretations.

Among the Norman royal garments currently kept in the imperial treasury of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, there are an Arabic-inscribed alb and stockings associated with the reign of William II (r. 1166–1189), in addition to the mantle, which can be dated to the reign of Roger II (r. 1130–1154). These garments entered the collection as parts of the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire.¹ The use of Arabic textile inscriptions at the Norman – and in this case also the Hohenstaufen – courts of Sicily is also documented through another group of evidence: the funerary garments discovered during the opening of the royal sarcophagi in Palermo Cathedral in the late eighteenth century.² The main body of source material upon which this study is based is thus restricted and clearly defined. The material is also highly exceptional for several reasons: first, it is the only group of medieval garments of this type and quality which remains almost totally intact; and, secondly, the garments are also exceptional because they prominently display Arabic textile inscriptions, which is unusual for garments produced for medieval Latin Christian rulers. In medieval Arabic courts, in contrast, textile inscriptions – in Arabic – were common. Inscribed textiles, so-called *ṭirāz*, often inscribed with the names and titles of the ruling caliphs, were produced in state-controlled workshops and were endowed with a distinctly political function.³

Sicily was under Islamic rule for nearly two hundred years, from the middle of the ninth century until the Norman conquest in the mid-eleventh century.⁴ Seeking connections between the Arabic past of the island and the arts produced at the Norman court would thus seem an obvious way to explain the appearance of Arabic textile inscriptions on the Norman royal garments. However, although the garments may well have been manufactured by local Arab artisans employed by the Norman court,

1 Hermann FILLITZ, *Die Insignien und Kleinodien des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, Vienna 1954.

2 Francesco DANIELE, *I regali sepolcri del duomo di Palermo riconosciuti e illustrati*, Naples 1784.

3 Jochen A. SOKOLY, *Ṭirāz Textiles from Egypt: Production, Administration and Uses of Ṭirāz Textiles from Egypt under the Umayyad, ‘Abbāsid and Fāṭimid Dynasties*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford 2002.

4 The most complete study of Islamic Sicily to date is Michele AMARI, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*. Seconda edizione modificata e accresciuta dall'autore, pubblicata con note a cura di Carlo Alfonso Nallino, ed. by Carlo A. NALLINO, Catania 1933–9 (henceforth AMARI/NALLINO). More recent publications include, for example, Alexander METCALFE, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, Edinburgh 2009.

there is no evidence to suggest that any inscribed textiles had been produced in Sicily before the coming of the Normans, nor do we know of any pre-Norman, Islamic textile institutions under court control. So the presence of Arabic inscriptions on the Norman kings' garments cannot be explained as a mere continuation of a *ṭirāz* tradition taken over from Islamic Sicily. Rather, it must be understood as the result of a conscious and active transfer of an originally Arabic ornamental motif to the Latin Christian court of Sicily. As I shall argue, this transfer was motivated not only by an aesthetic appreciation of this ornament's form, but also by a specific understanding of the functions of textile inscriptions in Arabic courtly contexts.

The Norman kings' garments and the extent of the indebtedness of Norman royal representation to the Arab tradition have received a fair amount of scholarly investigation.⁵ Stylistic affinities between the courtly arts of Norman Sicily and a great number of other – mostly Mediterranean – centres have been noted and the agency of the underlying movements of transfer has been explored. The main focus has been laid on relations between Sicily and Byzantium, the Islamic Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean;⁶ only very recently has more interest been manifested in the tracing of relations between Sicily and the Maghreb or Islamic Spain.⁷ However, apart from Roger II's mantle, which has been the subject of several articles,⁸ the royal garments themselves have not been much studied individually and independently from their use as coronation garments in the Holy Roman Empire. An important exception to this is the catalogue *Nobiles Officinae*, to which I refer throughout, published in two versions to accompany an exhibition held in Palermo and Vienna in 2003 and 2004.⁹

5 Bibliographical references will be given in the pertinent sections of the text.

6 One particularly noteworthy volume of collected studies is David KNIPP (ed.), *Art and Form in Norman Sicily* (Proceedings of an International Conference, Rome, 6–7 December 2002) (*Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 35), Munich 2003/4.

7 For example, Lev KAPITAÏKIN, 'The Daughter of Al-Andalus': Interrelations between Norman Sicily and the Muslim West, in: Alexander METCALFE and Mariam ROSSER-OWEN (eds), *Forgotten Connections? Medieval Material Culture and Exchange in the Central and Western Mediterranean*, *Al-Masaq* 25/1 (2013), pp. 113–34.

8 An excellent bibliography can be found in the section 'The so-called mantle of Roger II' of: Oleg GRABAR, *The Experience of Islamic Art*, in: Irene A. BIERMAN (ed.), *The Experience of Islamic Art on the Margins of Islam*, Los Angeles 2005, pp. 44–48. More recent publications include Almut HÖFERT, *Königliche Objektgeschichte. Der Krönungsmantel des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, in: Wolfram DREWS and Christian SCHOLL (eds), *Transkulturelle Verflechtungsprozesse in der Vormoderne (Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung. Beihefte 3)*, Berlin 2016, pp. 156–73; Isabelle DOLEZALEK, *Fashionable Form and Tailor-made Message: Transcultural Approaches to Arabic Script on the Royal Norman Mantle*, in: ead., Vera BEYER and Monica JUNEJA (eds), *Contextualising Choices: Islamicate Elements in European Arts*, *Medieval History Journal* 15/2 (2012), pp. 243–68.

9 Maria ANDALORO (ed.), *Nobiles Officinae: Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo* (Palermo, Palazzo Reale, December 2003–March 2004), Catania 2006 – henceforth referred to as *Nobiles Officinae* (2006). An earlier and less complete version of the catalogue is: Wilfried SEIPEL

The present study of Arabic textile inscriptions on the garments of the Christian kings of Sicily draws extensively on recent transcultural approaches to art history and to Mediterranean art history in particular.¹⁰ Building upon the influential works of Fernand Braudel, Shelomo D. Goitein, and, more recently, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell,¹¹ Mediterranean studies have gained increasing importance in current historical and art historical research, allowing me to benefit from and build upon a considerable number of publications. In these, the medieval Mediterranean, as a space encompassing both the sea and its adjoining lands under Byzantine, Arab and Latin rule, is conceived not only in geographical terms, but as a social space defined by the mobility of people and objects, knowledge and ideas.¹² Methodological concepts to approach such Mediterranean exchanges and encounters include those of transcultural transfer, a shared Mediterranean court culture and transcultural comparison; all of these have shaped the present study. Textiles from the medieval Mediterranean region were easily movable, highly prestigious objects of trade and diplomacy.¹³ Their status and their inherent functions both as ornamental objects and as portable agents of ornament-transfer make this artistic medium a particularly fruitful one for bringing these transcultural methodological strands together.

The idea of transfer has been of particular importance to recent approaches to Mediterranean artefacts and will be discussed extensively in the first chapter in terms of its relevance to Arabic ornamental inscriptions in Latinate contexts. Considerations of artistic transfer have entered art historical discourse as a means of looking

(ed.), *Nobiles Officinae: Die königlichen Hofwerkstätten zu Palermo zur Zeit der Normannen und Staufer im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 2004; Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, 2003–4), Vienna 2004 – henceforth *Nobiles Officinae* (2004).

10 On Mediterraneanism as an academic field and the political background to the increased interest in Mediterranean interchange, see Mariam ROSSER-OWEN, *Mediterraneanism: How to Incorporate Islamic Art into an Emerging Field*, in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012): <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/rosserowen.pdf> (last accessed 08/2016).

11 Peregrine HORDEN, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford 2000; Shelomoh Dov GOITEIN, *The Unity of the Mediterranean World in the 'Middle' Middle Ages*, in: *Studia Islamica* 12 (1960), pp. 29–42; Fernand BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949.

12 For a critical overview of art historical approaches, see, for example, Ulrike RITZERFELD, *Zu Problematik und Erkenntnispotential der Untersuchung materieller bzw. visueller Kulturen im Mittelmeerraum*, in: ead. and Margit MERSCH (eds), *Lateinisch-griechisch-arabische Begegnungen*, Berlin 2009, pp. 19–38; Ulrike KOENEN, Martina MÜLLER-WIENER, *Prolog zum Thema Grenzgänge*, in: ead. (eds), *Grenzgänge im östlichen Mittelmeerraum. Byzanz und die islamische Welt 9. bis 13. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 9–26.

13 Eva HOFFMAN, *Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century*, in: *Art History* 24 (2001), pp. 17–50; Anna MUTHESIUS, *Silken Diplomacy*, in: Jonathan SHEPARD and Simon FRANKLIN (eds), *Byzantine Diplomacy (Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies)*, Aldershot 1992, pp. 237–48.

beyond cultural boundaries, by laying an emphasis on mechanisms of interchange.¹⁴ While the concept has only recently been applied to the study of the medieval Mediterranean, it is used here to provide a framework within which the parts of ‘otherness’ observed within any given culture can be analysed with an emphasis on active reception and adaptation. This is an important step away from the thought of passively received ‘influences.’¹⁵ The notion of transcultural transfer, which has gained particular impetus in recent German scholarship on the medieval Mediterranean, has various components: the transferred object, characterised by its mobility; the spaces across which the object is transferred; and the agents (both people and things) occasioning the transfer.¹⁶ Concentrating on the different processes of transmission of Arabic written ornament and its integration into the Norman aesthetic idiom is a means to account for the visual complexity of the Norman objects without necessarily having to identify specific sources of influence. This focus also highlights the complexity of the multilingual, culturally diverse Sicilian society itself.

The notion of a shared court culture in the medieval Mediterranean, on the other hand – which has been equally influential and is also discussed in the first chapter – transcends the boundaries imposed by cultural and stylistic classifications. The first and probably most complete exposition of the concept of shared court culture in the medieval Mediterranean appears in Oleg Grabar’s article ‘The Shared Culture of Objects’, in which he focuses on the diplomatic exchange of artefacts between the Byzantine and Islamic courts.¹⁷ Grabar’s concept is based on the observation that a number of high-quality objects share certain visual characteristics, so that it is often difficult or impossible to establish their precise provenance: they do not openly display religious affiliations and were used and appreciated in Christian and Muslim courts alike. The circulation of these objects facilitated the creation and spread of a

14 Transfer as a concept is derived primarily from Michel Espagne’s theoretical considerations on modern Franco-German relations. See Michel ESPAGNE, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*, Paris 1999.

15 A comprehensive overview of approaches to transcultural history is given in the introduction to Wolfram DREWS, Christian SCHOLL, (eds), *Transkulturelle Verflechtungsprozesse in der Vormoderne (Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung. Beihefte 3)*, Berlin 2016, pp. VII–XXIV.

16 There is a historiographical overview and definition of ‘transfer’ in its application to the history of the medieval Mediterranean in Rania ABDELLATIF et al., *Construire la Méditerranée, penser les transferts culturels: Approches historiographiques et perspectives de recherche*, Munich 2012.

17 Oleg GRABAR, *The Shared Culture of Objects*, in: Henry MAGUIRE (ed.), *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), Washington DC 1997, pp. 115–30. The concept had already made its appearance in a lecture given by André and Oleg Grabar, observing Byzantine-Christian and Islamic courts from a comparative perspective: André GRABAR, Oleg GRABAR, *L’essor des arts inspirés par les cours princières à la fin du premier millénaire: Princes musulmans et princes chrétiens*, in: Giovanni ANTONELLI (ed.), *L’occidente e l’islam nell’alto medioevo* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo 12), Spoleto 1965, pp. 845–92.

Mediterranean aesthetic, in which possible Christian or Islamic provenances had no or only little importance. Grabar's thesis frees objects, such as the Norman garments, from the search for their origins. It thus offers a methodological perspective that complements the idea of transfer, acknowledging a Mediterranean unity with a common elite aesthetic in which precious textiles were an important component. Both these approaches will be assessed for their merits, but also for their limitations in the interpretation of the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions.

The central focus of Chapter 1 lies in the visual analysis of the royal garments, the presentation of their inscriptions and the question of the technical and stylistic coherence of these Norman textiles as a group within Latin court culture. However, far from being a merely descriptive introduction, this chapter also discusses the impact that historical receptions of the Norman garments have had on their subsequent interpretations, including the most recent ones. I argue that scholarly interpretations of the Arabic inscriptions on the Norman garments were frequently shaped by the historical reception of this ornament as foreign, and influenced by the perception of Arabic inscriptions as an inherently Islamic ornament. Building further upon the methodological considerations briefly introduced here, Chapter 1 discusses the foundations of later art historical interpretations of the objects and ultimately touches upon the problem of the contingency of cultural boundaries. In fact, as is shown here, textiles with Arabic inscriptions were more common in medieval Latin Europe than one might think. Costly fabrics of this type circulated widely throughout Europe and were appreciated and used both in courtly and religious contexts regardless of the language and content of their inscriptions. Unlike the Sicilian garments, however, these fabrics were imported; they were not produced at a Latin court and for a Latin ruler.

While the first chapter establishes the specificity of the Norman textiles within the frame of Latin court culture, casting a glance at their biography and their scholarly reception, it is the aim of Chapter 2 to analyse written textile ornament in Norman Sicily with reference to Arabic court culture. Pursuing the hypothesis that the use of textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily was based on an awareness of their use in contemporary Arabic contexts, the chapter concentrates on production, as well as on the form, content and function of the inscriptions. To provide an anchor for an otherwise abstract argument, the chapter relies on a comparison of Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt.

The comparative method, which I apply in Chapter 2 to contrast the Norman garments with Fatimid textiles is less prominent in Mediterranean art history, though in this case study it is – I believe – a necessary complement to the concepts of transfer and shared court culture. The methodological implications of transcultural comparative approaches with reference to medieval Islamic and Christian arts are an impor-

tant component of Vera Beyer's work.¹⁸ Her research and recently published works by Wolfram Drews, Almut Höfert and Jenny Oesterle, whose comparative historical approach is specifically concerned with forms of medieval rulership and the Fatimids, have contributed to widening my outlook beyond the strict disciplinary frame of art history, and offered valuable guidance for this study.¹⁹ An interesting comparative study by Leonie von Wilckens, on the other hand, deals with Sicilian, Fatimid and Andalusian textiles.²⁰ Her focus is quite different to my own, however, as her main interest lies in tracing stylistic resemblances between Egyptian and Spanish textiles and those of the lining of Roger II's mantle, rather than in analysing the functions of one particular textile ornament, as I have done, and revealing differences. In fact, the results of my comparison clearly show that the Arabic textile inscriptions were not merely copied, but carefully adapted to suit local Sicilian needs. Looking at the Norman inscribed textiles from a comparative perspective underlines their idiosyncrasy. Moreover, the comparison highlights not only the transformations that may occur in the course of the transfer of an ornamental motif, but also the way in which its meaning and function vary depending upon the context in which it is used. This raises the question of the choices underlying the creation of these written ornaments in their original context at the Norman court of Sicily, which is addressed in the second part of the study.

The final frame that I use to contextualise the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions in the last three chapters is strictly local, therefore, and mainly centred on Palermo. To understand the processes of appropriation and adaptation of Arabic textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily, both the wider transregional and the local contexts need to be taken into account.²¹ Concentrating on inscriptions in one particular medium, as done in the earlier chapters with reference to textiles, is a useful way of keeping a transcultural discourse within manageable limits. However, to contextu-

18 See, for example, Vera BEYER, *Das Kleinkarierte lesen: Zum Verhältnis von Ornament und Figur in persischen und niederländischen Bildern um 1400*, in: Lorenz KORN and Anja HEIDENREICH (eds), *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie*, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 266–91.

19 Almut HÖFERT, Wolfram DREWS, *Monarchische Herrschaftsformen im transkulturellen Vergleich. Argumentationsstrategien zur Rechtfertigung von Usurpationen bei Karolingern und Abbasiden*, in: Michael BORGOLTE and Bernd SCHNEIDMÜLLER (eds), *Hybride Kulturen im mittelalterlichen Europa. Vorträge und Workshops einer Frühlingsschule*, Berlin 2010, pp. 229–44; Jenny R. OESTERLE, *Kalifat und Königtum: Herrschaftsrepräsentation der Fatimiden, Ottonen und frühen Salier an religiösen Hochfesten*, Darmstadt 2009.

20 Leonie VON WILCKENS, *Byzantinische, griechische, sizilische, italienische und andere Stickereien des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*, in: Birgitt BORKOPP, Barbara SCHELLEWALD and Lioba THEIS (eds), *Studien zur Byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte, Festschrift für Horst Hallersleben zum 65. Geburtstag*, Amsterdam 1995, pp. 279–85.

21 Contextualisation as a tool has also been advocated by William Tronzo. See William TRONZO, *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Princeton 1997, p. 14.

alise the transcultural phenomenon of Arabic textile inscriptions within the artistic and socio-political frames of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sicily, I have chosen to lay aside the strict focus in this last part, to take into account aspects not only of both European and Islamic art history, but also of tangent historical disciplines, such as epigraphic, administrative and legal history. In the last chapters, the phenomenon of ornamental writing on the garments is thus assessed within a broader, yet local, frame of political writing in the service of the Norman court, including epigraphy and administrative documents.

After having established the specificities of the Norman textile inscriptions within Latin and Arabic court culture in the first two chapters, Chapter 3 shows that in Norman Sicily, the use of public writing in Arabic was an active choice, largely independent of such practical considerations as the language of the craftsmen – or indeed of the audience of the inscriptions. Reconstructing, as far as possible, the original context of the Norman royal garments in Norman Palermo, in the treasury and royal ceremonies, I look at the aesthetic dimensions through which the Arabic textile inscriptions may have functioned, including their materiality, visibility (or indeed invisibility) and sound. My contention is that they did not carry a single message alone, but depending on when and where the inscriptions were seen or heard, and by whom, functions and meanings could change.²² Moreover, the use of Arabic textile inscriptions on Norman royal garments was, as I argue, also based on varied motivations, depending on the political context of the different Norman kings.

As an extension of Chapter 3, the political needs determining Roger II and William II's Arabic royal image are assessed in the last two chapters. The focus of Chapter 4 is on Roger II's mantle; it seeks to establish how rooted it was in a local Sicilian artistic tradition. This chapter proposes that the use of Arabic inscriptions under Roger II may be the result of an adaptation of pre-Norman Sicilian traditions, and assesses the extent to which they reflect a political need to demonstrate uninterrupted authority. While political continuity is key also to understanding William II's inscribed garments, I argue in the last chapter that the alb's bilingual inscription has a distinctly legal function as a textile document attesting to William II's sovereignty. Drawing upon aspects of legal history, this chapter assesses this documentary function of the inscription and the materials of the alb in the specific political frame of the reigns of William II and, beyond the Norman realm, of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen.

Interdisciplinary work is necessarily selective and may frustrate expectations. In Paul Bowman's words, 'the claim of interdisciplinarity signals an eminently pure academic activity, consisting, as it would seem, of a redoubling of academic effort.' But

²² A collection of recently published case studies of medieval inscriptions corroborates this approach to inscriptions as carrying multiple dimensions. Anthony EASTMOND (ed.), *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, Cambridge 2015.

‘the “interdiscipline” will be less, or at least other than, *improper in terms of*, each discipline it travels between.’²³ Despite its clear focus on textiles and Norman Sicily, this study is not what historians of Norman Sicily, or indeed textile historians, might have been waiting for: a publication of new source material. Yet trying not only to juxtapose different disciplines, but also to work with and within each of their limits, integrating different methods and linking different types of historical knowledge in one argumentative strand, can also be extremely rewarding for opening entirely new perspectives on already known objects that have been previously studied within distinct disciplinary frames.²⁴ Taking the boundary-transgressing composition of this study’s objects as my point of departure, I have aimed to think beyond the traditionally rigid disciplinary boundaries between Islamic and European art histories and to work with ideas of the function of writing borrowed from other historical disciplines.²⁵ The symbolic and ritual use of writing in the performance of medieval legal acts, a theme which has come to the fore in recent legal history, is but one example.²⁶ The result of this, I would hope, is a novel and more integrated approach to the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions, one which offers insights into the objects of this study from many different perspectives.

The very restricted focus in my work on Arabic inscriptions as a textile ornament in use at the Latin Christian court of Norman Sicily is an attempt to complement the multitude of recently published and more theoretical works in the field of transcultural history and art history by a concrete case study, and to experiment practically with transcultural approaches. My narrow focus on Arabic script at the Norman court has also directed the choice of the contextual frames with which I have worked towards the Arabic and Latin contexts, thus excluding Byzantium, which is less relevant to the contextualisation of this particular aspect of the visual culture of Norman Sicily. The categories of Latin and Arabic court culture, drawn upon in this study, are, of course, shaped by the conventions of art historical discourse, which acknowledge cultural boundaries and the separation of Islamic and European art history. In fact, the division along the disciplinary boundaries of ‘Islamic’, ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Euro-

23 Paul BOWMAN, ‘Alarming and Calming. Sacred and Accursed’ – The Proper Impropriety of Interdisciplinarity, in: Stefan HERBRECHTER (ed.), *Cultural studies. Interdisciplinarity and Translation* (Critical Studies 20), Amsterdam, New York 2002, p. 61.

24 As opposed to multidisciplinary, an approach which ‘juxtaposes disciplines’, Julie Thompson Klein defines ‘interdisciplinarity’ as a means of ‘integrating, interacting, linking and blending’ different disciplines. Julie THOMPSON KLEIN, *A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity*, in: Robert FRODEMAN et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, Oxford 2010, p. 17.

25 The constructedness of disciplinary boundaries, and of interdisciplinarity itself, as an ‘interdiscipline’ is discussed in Harvey J. GRAFF, *Undisciplining Knowledge. Interdisciplinarity in the Twentieth Century*, Baltimore 2015, p. 5.

26 Hagen KELLER, *Mündlichkeit – Schriftlichkeit – symbolische Interaktion: Mediale Aspekte der ‘Öffentlichkeit’ im Mittelalter*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 38 (2004), pp. 277–86.

pean' art history is customary in the study of the arts of Norman Sicily, which are often analysed in terms of their dependence on one or another artistic tradition. The problems arising from this fragmentation will be addressed throughout this study. However, such categories, as well as the alternative category of 'transculturalism',²⁷ can provide useful analytical frameworks to operate – carefully – within, not only to underscore the idiosyncrasy of the Norman objects, but also to reveal the problems and limitations of pre-defined concepts of cultural entities.

²⁷ Almut HÖFERT, Anmerkungen zum Konzept einer transkulturellen Geschichtsschreibung in der deutschsprachigen Forschung, in: Wolfram DREWS, Jenny R. OESTERLE (eds), *Transkulturelle Komparatistik. Beiträge zu einer Globalgeschichte der Vormoderne*, *Comparativ | Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 18/3.4 (2009), pp. 15–26.

Chapter I

Shaping Perceptions: Reading and Interpreting the Norman Arabic Textile Inscriptions

Textiles with Arabic inscriptions were known and used in medieval Latinate Europe, but among the remaining textile evidence the Norman inscribed textiles deserve particular attention. First, they were not foreign imports but produced at the court of the Latin Christian kings of Sicily. Unlike pseudo-inscriptions or others with merely generic contents, all Norman Arabic inscriptions are legible and refer to the Norman court. Moreover, the reception of the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions can be traced across the centuries thanks to the continued use of the Norman royal garments in the Holy Roman Empire. Although the total amount of material sources for the study of textiles from Norman Sicily is limited, it is entirely unparalleled in the sources known for any other contemporary Latin Christian court. The Norman textiles with Arabic inscriptions thus provide an excellent body of material to assess the function of an ornamental motif that is often perceived as foreign to the aesthetic idioms of Latinate Europe. In this chapter, which introduces the textile protagonists of this study and their inscriptions, I argue that scholarly interpretations of the Arabic inscriptions on the Norman garments were frequently shaped by the past reception of this ornament as a foreign intrusion into the European visual idiom and by the perception of Arabic inscriptions as inherently Islamic.

An often quoted passage from George Pachymeres offers a marvellous illustration of some of the assumptions underlying the transfer of written ornament from ‘Islamic’ to ‘Western’ aesthetics: Pachymeres writes of a religious ceremony during which a sumptuous metal plate inscribed with Arabic letters was to be presented to the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos (1224/5–1282).¹ It was rejected with disgust, however, once one of the courtiers deciphered the inscription as spelling out the name of Mohammad. Subsequently, the patriarch responsible for the ceremony was dismissed. This transformation of ornament into language, in Robert Nelson’s terms, is representative of the transformation – through the act of reading – of a merely decorative ornamental form into a meaningful one.² While Arabic letters appear to have been an acceptable ornament in a Christian context, language with strong Islamic connotations, on the other hand, was not. So religious neutrality – or at least a certain

¹ Georges Pachymères, *Relations historiques V*, ed. and trans. by Albert FAILLER (*Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 25/5), Paris 1984, pp. 572–75; Robert NELSON, *Letters and Language/Ornament and Identity*, in: Irene A. BIERMAN (ed.), *The Experience of Islamic Art on the Margins of Islam*, Los Angeles 2005, p. 81.

² NELSON (2005), p. 69.

ignorance of original functions and meanings – is presented here as a prerequisite for the transfer of ornamental forms between Islamic and Christian cultures.

The anecdote from the Byzantine court transmits an image of clear-cut cultural entities perceived in terms of religious antagonisms, which, as we shall see, is reminiscent of eighteenth-century interpretations of Arabic inscriptions in Christian contexts. Transfer across the boundaries is presented, in the first case, as the result of an appreciation of the form, which relies upon an ignorance or denial of meaning. In the second case, the later reception, the transfer of Arabic script to a Christian king's garments is interpreted as a mark of appropriation and therefore superiority. Of course, the background to Pachymeres' anecdote is far more complex: Nelson's analysis returns the episode to a historical context of courtly intrigues in which the inscription's Islamic content is taken as a pretext for incriminating those in charge of the ceremony.³ Nevertheless, the anecdote also raises key questions about the status of inscriptions and their permanent oscillation between ornament and language, especially – but not exclusively – in the course of their transfer between cultural spheres.

Drawing on Oleg Grabar's *Mediation of Ornament*, in which he defines writing in Islamic art as intending to 'please, amaze, or persuade',⁴ Nelson states that '[...] provided that the intention to persuade was secondary or non-existent, designs could pass from Islam to Byzantium, trailing their clouds of decorative glory and transcending the censoring barriers of state ideology and religious dogma.'⁵ This corresponds to Oleg Grabar's concept of a shared court culture in the medieval Mediterranean, which has frequently been drawn upon in recent art historical literature and which I propose to analyse with reference to the Arabic textile inscriptions.⁶ The following section questions the assumption of meaninglessness – of a purely formal appreciation – and the general assumption of ignorance as a prerequisite and, at the same time, a result of the transfer of ornament between Islamic and Christian spheres.

1 Arabic-Inscribed Textiles from Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily

The documented and surviving textiles and royal garments from Norman Sicily mainly consist of two groups, which offer unique insights for the study of both ceremonial and funerary garments in use in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sicily. The first and best known group is that preserved in Vienna, which includes the garments formerly used as the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire. The second, lesser-studied group comprises the textiles found and documented in 1781, during the opening of

³ Ibid., pp. 70–71.

⁴ Oleg GRABAR, *The Mediation of Ornament*, Princeton 1992, p. 115.

⁵ NELSON (2005), p. 71.

⁶ GRABAR (1997).

the royal sarcophagi in Palermo. Both groups of textiles also include material sources associated with the Hohenstaufen successors of the Norman kings, some of which will be discussed here, since the relations between the dynasties were particularly pronounced and continuities can be noted in royal representation. In addition to the ceremonial and funerary garments, a number of other textiles have also been associated with Norman Sicily, but it is often difficult to verify their Sicilian provenance.

1.1 The Norman Ceremonial Garments in Vienna

The group of Sicilian ceremonial garments from the Norman and Hohenstaufen periods on display in the Secular Treasury of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna consists of Roger II's mantle, a tunic and an alb, as well as a cingulum, a sword belt, stockings, shoes and gloves.⁷ Although the garments originate from a period running from the reign of Roger II (r. 1130–1154) to that of Frederick II (r. 1198–1250), and were not initially conceived as parts of an ensemble, they were used in this combination as the coronation vestments of the Holy Roman Emperors until the dissolution of the Empire in 1806.⁸

Inscriptions – Arabic inscriptions in particular – occupy a prominent place on the garments preserved in Vienna. The artefacts are of the highest quality and were made of very costly materials. They may thus have to be considered exceptional, rather than representative of the general output of the Norman textile workshops. The fact, however, that so many garments with Arabic inscriptions have been preserved suggests that these in particular were seen as especially precious. Moreover, the prominence of the Arabic inscriptions on these garments indicates that written ornament had a specific function, in addition to being appreciated for its form. The inscriptions will be described in detail in the following section, but they are also listed in the appendix.

7 Nobiles Officinae (2006), cat. I.1–I.10. Nobiles Officinae (2004), cat. 65–73. Hermann FILLITZ, *Die Krönungsgewänder des Heiligen Römischen Reiches und ihr Verhältnis zu Byzanz*, in: *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 4 (1955), pp. 123–34; Eduard EICHMANN, *Von der Kaisergewandung im Mittelalter*, in: *Historisches Jahrbuch* 58 (1938), pp. 268–304.

8 Rotraud BAUER, *Zur Geschichte der sizilischen Gewänder, später Krönungsgewänder der Könige und Kaiser des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, in: Nobiles Officinae (2004), pp. 85–95. Italian and English translations of this text can be found in Nobiles Officinae (2006). In this study, I refer to the first publication of the catalogue texts if they were originally written in German and did not undergo major changes in the augmented version of the catalogue published in 2006. All other texts are also cited in their original language from Nobiles Officinae (2006).



Fig. 2: Mantle of Roger II, 1133/4, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. n. XIII 14.

1.1.1 Roger II's Mantle

Two of the garments preserved in Vienna can be associated with the reign of Roger II (1130–1154): the mantle and the blue tunic. Technical details, such as the type of stitching and the motifs on the tunic's gold-embroidered hem, suggest that these are likely to have been made at roughly the same time in the 1130s.⁹ Of these two, however, only the mantle carries an inscription. Roger II's mantle (345 × 146 cm), whose embroidery is dated to 528 AH (1133/4), is undoubtedly the most famous piece among the royal Norman garments (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The semicircular shape of the mantle derives from the Latin liturgical tradition and can be compared to the *pluviale* (or *cappa*) worn by the clergy on special occasions as an alternative overgarment to the chasuble. The same shape is also used for imperial coronation vestments.¹¹

The mantle displays a very complex combination of various crafts and textiles from different periods and provenances. Thanks to the inscription, the mantle's embroidery can be securely dated and ascribed to the court of Roger II in Palermo. The woven ground fabric with its incised pattern, in contrast, seems to have been imported. In fact, a Byzantine origin of the ground fabric is very likely, as Regula Schorta has shown by revealing technical parallels with Byzantine monochrome

⁹ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 67, p. 264.

¹⁰ Ead., in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 66. For more bibliographical references on the mantle, see also William TRONZO, *King Roger's Mantle, Part and Whole*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), pp. 443–46; and GRABAR (2005), pp. 44–48.

¹¹ Emperors were to be invested by the pope with an amice, alb, cingulum, tunic, dalmatic, pluvial, mitre, stockings, shoes and gloves for their coronation, according to the Imperial Ordo C II. See FIL-LITZ (1955), p. 124; and EICHMANN (1938).



Fig. 3: Detail of the lining of Roger II's mantle.

silks.¹² The mantle's lining, on the other hand, is made of different silk fabrics, most of which were added to the mantle during the later centuries of its use in the Holy Roman Empire. The best known of these are the five long strips of lining running along the mantle's hem: these consist of three different gold-woven fabrics with figures, in tapestry technique, which have been called the *Vogel*-, *Drachen* and *Sündenfallstoff* (Fig. 3).¹³ They may even predate the mantle's embroidery, as Ruth Grönwoldt has suggested.¹⁴ If her hypothesis is right, the mantle would from the start have consisted of a conglomerate of textiles from different periods. The various strata of its lining

¹² Regula SCHORTA, *Monochrome Seidengewebe des hohen Mittelalters, Untersuchungen zu Webtechnik und Musterung*, Berlin 2001, pp. 142–44.

¹³ Arpad Weixlgärtner coined the terms 'bird-', 'dragon-' and 'fall of mankind-textile', which are often used to refer to the lining. These slightly odd terms are based on his interpretation of their unusual iconography. Arpad WEIXLGÄRTNER, *Die Weltliche Schatzkammer in Wien: Neue Funde und Forschungen*, Vienna 1926.

¹⁴ Ruth GRÖNWOLDT, *Sicilian Textiles Employed in the Imperial Coronation Vestments in Vienna*, in: Simonetta CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *La seta in Europa sec. XIII–XX*, Florence 1993, pp. 895–900. Creating such a 'patchwork' of different fabrics was not unusual. Precious fabrics often seem to have been combined for the practical reason of their availability: Birgitt BORKOPP-RESTLE, Barbara SCHELLEWALD,



Fig. 4: Detail of pearls, enamel and embroidery on the mantle.

exemplify the different layers of meaning and connotation which the mantle acquired over time and which would have further increased with every ceremony for which the mantle was taken out, adjusted and worn.

The most prominent element in the ornamentation of the mantle is doubtless its gold-embroidered iconography. The motif of a lion triumphant over a camel, symmetrically mirrored on either side of a tree,¹⁵ dominates the entire composition of the semicircular samite. It is framed by a band with gold-embroidered Kufic writing (482 cm × 6 cm), lined by a tablet-woven band (c. 2.5 cm) which spans the whole width of the mantle and provides a dark hem for the red fabric. The outlines of the embroidered motifs and the division line between the fields of figurative imagery and writing have been highlighted with a double row of pearls. The straight edge of the fabric has been given an ornamented band of the same width as the writing, where double rows of pearls create the outlines of a repeating pattern of quadrifoliated and foliated lozenges. The pattern has been filled with various enamelled appliques and

Ein Ornat für den Lübecker Dom. Heinrich II. Bocholt – Inszenierung im Leben und nach dem Tode, in: *Zeitschrift für Lübeckische Geschichte* 91 (2011), pp. 9–27.

¹⁵ The tree, often termed the ‘tree-of-life’, probably originating from ancient Oriental prototypes, is a popular motif in the iconography of Norman Sicily and can be found in a variety of media, including the mosaics of the Zisa or those of the *Stanza Normanna* in the palace of Palermo. On the motif: Piotr SKUBISZEWSKI, *Le trumeau et le linteau de Moissac: Un cas de symbolisme médiéval*, in: *Cahiers archéologiques: fin de l’antiquité et moyen âge* 40 (1992), pp. 51–90.



Fig. 5: Lion attacking a camel, 12th c., lintel, portal of Lucca cathedral.

gold-embroidered palmettes (Fig. 4). The remarkable variety in the mantle's ornaments offers an insight into the nature of the royal workshop, in which craftsmen with different specialisations appear to have collaborated closely.

While the motif of lions triumphant over another animal is common,¹⁶ the combination of lion and camel on the mantle, and their ambiguous relation, has sparked vivid debates. One other example of this motif is known from Norman Palermo, on the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina,¹⁷ but there are very few recorded further instances in which a camel has been represented as the lion's counterpart. In his catalogue of comparative material to the iconography of the Cappella Palatina, Ernst Grube includes only one example of a similar motif, which also dates from the twelfth century: a lion killing a male camel, appearing in the main portal of Lucca cathedral (Fig. 5).¹⁸ But camels also appear in various written sources, for example in Geoffrey Malaterra's chronicle, which reports that Roger of Hauteville sent Pope Alexander II (1061–73) four camels that had been taken as booty after the battle of Cerami in Sicily in 1063, in which Norman forces fought Arab Kalbid and Zirid troops.¹⁹

¹⁶ On political symbolisms of combatant animals: Eva BAER, *Ornament versus Emblem: The Case of Combattant Animals*, in: Barbara FINSTER, Christa FRAGNER and Herta HAFENRICHTER (eds), *Rezeption in der Islamischen Kunst* (Bamberger Symposium vom 26.6.–28.6.1992), Beirut 1999, pp. 13–18.

¹⁷ An illustration can be found in *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), p. 49, Fig. 4.

¹⁸ Ernst J. GRUBE, Jeremy JOHNS (eds), *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, London 2005, p. 191, Fig. 57.6.

¹⁹ Hubert HOUBEN, *Roger II. von Sizilien. Herrscher zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Darmstadt 1997, p. 21. Galfredus Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardii Ducis fratris eius*, ed. by Ernesto PONTIERI (*Rerum italicarum scriptores* 5/1), Bologna 1927–28, p. 44 (translation: Galfredus Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of his Brother*

Although the mantle's lion and camel motif could thus be thought to symbolise the domination of the Norman king (lion) over the Muslims (camel) who previously ruled over Sicily, the association of Arabs or Muslims with camels is difficult, if not impossible, to verify for that time. On the basis of written evidence from various chronicles, William Tronzo suggests that camels would have been associated more generally with incompetent rulers, usurpers and tyrants. In the twelfth century, deposed rulers in Byzantium were put on many camels; furthermore, Antipope Gregory VIII was forced to enter Rome on a camel in 1121.²⁰ The mantle's iconography may thus be seen to proclaim that bad rule in Sicily has been overcome by Roger II.²¹ However, rather than being represented as ignoble beasts, the camels on the mantle are domesticated – they carry a saddle and a harness – which adds to the ambiguity of the scene. Although the relationship between the lions and the camels on the mantle is clearly one of domination and submission, it has been given varying interpretations. Oleg Grabar, for example, associates the sexual dimension which may be seen to emanate from the motif to the context of the mantle's creation. He suggests that the mantle may have been embroidered by the women at Roger II's court as a gift for their lover, the king.²² Other authors have remarked upon the peculiar coloured rosettes embroidered on the knees and legs of the animals, as well as on the lions' noses and foreheads, which may have represented constellations, thus hinting at the cosmic connotations of the mantle.²³ Rotraud Bauer remarks that the rosettes are placed in positions resembling those of the constellation of Leo, as it is seen on an Egyptian *mappamondo* from 1225 (Museo di Capodimonte, Naples). She also refers to the Biblical sources for the cosmic symbolism of royal mantles; Henry II's so-called '*Sternen-mantel*' (Diözesanmuseum Bamberg) can be mentioned as an additional example. Nevertheless, in the absence of any further evidence on the mantle and the possible meaning of its distinctive iconography within the context of its creation in Norman Sicily, it is impossible to reach any firm conclusions on the motif.

Duke Robert Guiscard by Geoffrey Malaterra, ed. and trans. by Kenneth B. Wolf, Michigan 2005, p. 111). For archaeological and literary evidence for the presence and use of camels in late antique and early medieval Europe, see Jacopo de Grossi Mazzorin, *Presenze di cammelli nell'Antichità in Italia e in Europa: Aggiornamenti*, in: Giuliano Volpe, Antonietta Buglione and Giovanni De Venuto (eds), *Vie degli animali, vie degli uomini: Transumanza*, Bari 2010, pp. 91–106.

²⁰ William Tronzo, *The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily*, in: Stewart Gordon (ed.), *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, New York 2001, p. 249.

²¹ I am grateful to Anna Bücheler for pointing out an interesting parallel with the *Cathedra Petri*, the throne of Charlemagne. Not camels but ignoble sea creatures are represented at the bottom of the throne; they have visually and symbolically been overcome by the enthroned Christian ruler.

²² Grabar (2005), p. 41.

²³ Rotraud Bauer, *Il mantello di Ruggero II*, in: Mario D'Onofrio (ed.), *I Normanni popolo d'Europa 1030–1200* (Rome, Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, 1994), Venice 1994, p. 280.

Oddly enough, the various interpretations of the mantle's iconography only seldom take into account the Arabic inscription, although its content had already been made available – even to non-Arabists – by the eighteenth century, when Christoph Gottlieb von Murr published it almost accurately transcribed and translated.²⁴ Tronzo and Grabar provide exceptions in including the laudatory content of the mantle's inscription in their interpretation of the garment's overall iconographic scheme, which, they argue, praises Roger II's reign.²⁵ The language of the inscription follows a rhythmical structure in rhymes, which derives from an elegant type of Arabic literary prose called *saj'*.²⁶

The Arabic inscription of Roger II's mantle can be transcribed and translated as follows:²⁷

مما عمل بالخزانة الملكية المعمورة بالسعد والجلال والجد والكمال
والطول والافضل والقبول والاقبال والسماحة والجلال والفخر والجمال وبلوغ
الاماني والامال وطيب الايام والليال بلا زوال ولا انتقال بالعز والدعاية
والحفظ والحماية والسعد والسلامة والنصر والكفاية بمدينة صقلية سنة ثمان
وعشرين وخمسمائة

'Of what was made in the *khizāna* (treasury), inhabited by happiness and glory, good fortune and perfection, and long (life) and merits, and welcome and prosperity, and generosity and splendour, and glory and beauty, and realisation of desires (?) and hopes, and delights of days and nights, without end and without modification, with might and care, and sponsorship and protection, and happiness and well-being, and triumph and sufficiency. In the city of Sicily, in the year 528.'

The inscription is embroidered in clear and regular letters, some of which – such as the *alif* (ا) and *lām* (ل) – are embellished with prolonged letter shafts with tooth-shaped terminals (Fig. 6). Other normally descending letters – such as the و (*wāw*), م (*mīm*) and ر (*rā*) – have been rendered with ascending terminals and some of the diacritical marks, normally lacking in this inscription, have been indicated with sche-

²⁴ Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, Beschreibung der sämtlichen Reichskleinodien und Heiligthümer, welche in der des H. R. Reichs freyen Stadt Nürnberg aufbewahret werden, Nuremberg 1790, pp. 41–42.

²⁵ Grabar (2005); Tronzo (2001).

²⁶ Jeremy Johns, The Arabic Inscriptions of the Norman Kings of Sicily. A Reinterpretation, in: Nobles Officinae (2006), pp. 327.

²⁷ 'Mimmā 'umīla bi-l-khizānat | al-malakiya al-ma'mūra | bi-l-sa'd wa-l-ijlāl | wa-l-jadd wa-l-kamāl | wa-l-ṭul wa-l-afḍāl | wa-l-qabūl wa-l-iqbāl | wa-l-samāḥa wa-l-jalāl | wa-l-fakhr wa-l-jamāl | wa-bulūgh al-amān(i?) wa-l-āmāl | wa-ṭib al-ayyām wa-l-layāl | bi-lā zawāl wa-lā intiqāl | bi-l-'izz wa-l-dī'ya | wa-l-ḥifẓ wa-l-ḥimāya | wa-l-sa'd wa-l-salāma | wa-l-naṣr wa-l-kifāya | bi-madīnat Ṣiqilliya | sana thamān wa-'ishrīn wa-khamsmī'a.' The markings of the rhymes with dashes are taken from Jeremy Johns. See Johns (2006), p. 327. See also appendix.



Fig. 6: Inscription on Roger II's mantle, detail.

matished floral shapes.²⁸ Tarif Al-Samman identifies the script as an elegantly ornated Fatimid type of monumental Kufic, very rare on textiles, where one would rather expect Naskhi and Thuluth scripts at this time.²⁹ In fact, the script chosen here is also surprisingly plain – heavily floriated types of Kufic had already been in use in Fatimid Cairo, for instance, since the eleventh century (this feature of the inscription is scrutinised later in this study).³⁰

The slightly obsolete style of the inscription raises the question whether the origins of the Norman use of Arabic inscriptions may have to be traced to a local Sicilian tradition. And, in fact, the different frames in which the mantle's inscription will be analysed in the following chapters highlight not only the uniqueness of the garment, but also a certain anchoring in the Sicilian tradition, the political implications of which will be discussed in the penultimate chapter.

1.1.2 The Alb from the Period of William II

Two further garments that carry Arabic inscriptions, but which have been much less studied than the mantle, are commonly associated with the reign of William II (r. 1166–1189): the alb and stockings.³¹ However, closer analysis shows that an attribution to William II may be possible only for parts of these garments. This is an important detail with major implications for both their political and spiritual functions.

In its present shape, the alb, which was altered over the centuries, consists of textiles dateable to several different periods (Fig. 7). The cuffs and arm-bands, the large breast-panel and the orphrey, all gold-embroidered and decorated with pearls, are

²⁸ Tarif AL-SAMMAN, Arabische Inschriften auf den Krönungsgewändern des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, in: Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien 78 (1982), p. 32. This is the case with the word *'ishrin* (عشرين) at the end of the inscription. The three dots above the ش (shin) have been rendered as a *fleur-de-lys* above the ع ('ayn).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 32. See Muhammad Abdil Aziz MARZOUK, The Evolution of Inscriptions on Fatimid Textiles, in: *Ars Islamica* 10 (1943), pp. 164–67.

³⁰ Conf. Chapter 2.3.

³¹ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 68 and 69.



Fig. 7: Alb, late 12th- early 13th c., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. n. XIII 7.

dateable to the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century and originate from Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily. The white ground fabric, on the other hand, has been dated to the eighteenth century.³² Furthermore, during recent conservation work on the alb, three layers of white silk from different periods were found between the outer fabric and the present lining, together with a further breast-panel, gold-embroidered on purple-dyed silk (probably older than the outer one), on one of the underlayers.³³ This indicates that textiles that had once belonged to the garment were kept, rather than being discarded when they had to be replaced.

On the same occasion, the conservators discovered three handwritten notes in simple Arabic Thuluth script, written by the same hand in black ink on three pieces of linen. They had been sewn into the arm-bands and right cuff:³⁴

هذا أول الثلث الذي عمله مح

a/ From the right arm-band (Fig. 8): 'This is the beginning of the third which Mḥ [... / Muḥsin?] made...'

هذا الثلث الذي عمله علي المالطي دجله من اللؤلؤ على يد القائد دميان
رجع من ذلك عند فتنقه وتكليله ثاني كره على يد الفني طوماس بتاريخ (١٢)
[مايو الرابع]

b/ From the left arm-band (Fig. 9): 'This is the third that 'Alī of Maḥṭa made, he covered it with pearls on the order of the overseer Damiyan. He did that again [restarted in that respect, i.e. covered it again in pearls] when it was unsewn and decorated the second time, on order of the artisan³⁵ Ṭūmas on the [12th of...]'

³² Ibid., cat. 68, p. 266.

³³ Ibid., p. 271.

³⁴ The first Arabic transcription, translation and discussion of the notes was published in AL-SAMMAN (1982), pp. 12–19. Transcription on the basis of Al-Samman's Arabic readings: a/ 'hadhā awwal al-thulth alladhī 'amilahū Muḥ... / Maḥ [...?]. b/ 'hadhā al-thulth alladhī 'amilahū 'Ālī l-Mālṭī dajjalāhū min al-lu'lu' 'alā yad al-qā'id Damiyān[ān...], raja' min dhālik 'ind fatqihī wa taklīlīhī thānī karra 'alā yad al-fannī Ṭūmas bi-ta'rikh 12 Māyū...'. c/ 'hadhā al-thulth alladhī 'amilahū Marzūq dajjalāhū min al-lu'lu' 'alā yad al-qā'id Damiyān tis'in dirham, raja' min dhālik 'ind fatqihī wa-taklīlīhī thānī karra bi-ta'rikh 12 Māyū l-rābi' 'alā yad al-fannī Ṭūmas tis' khurab.' For slightly divergent transcriptions and translations of the inscriptions, see JOHNS (2006), p. 330.

³⁵ Johns proposes an alternative reading of the word *fannī* (artisan) as *fatā* (youth – possibly a palace eunuch in this context). JOHNS (2006), p. 331.

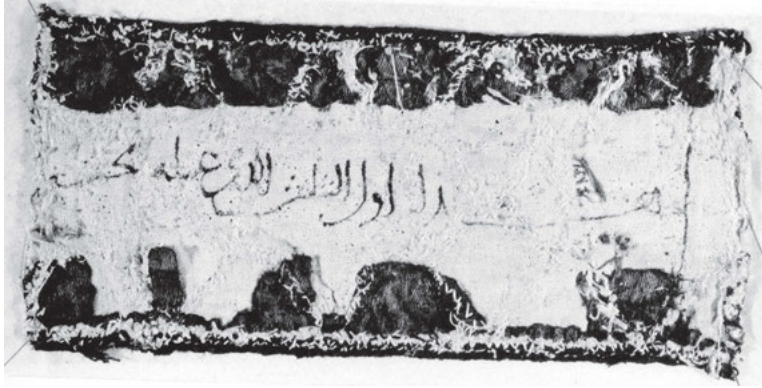


Fig. 8: Handwritten note from the right arm-band of the alb, 1156 (?).

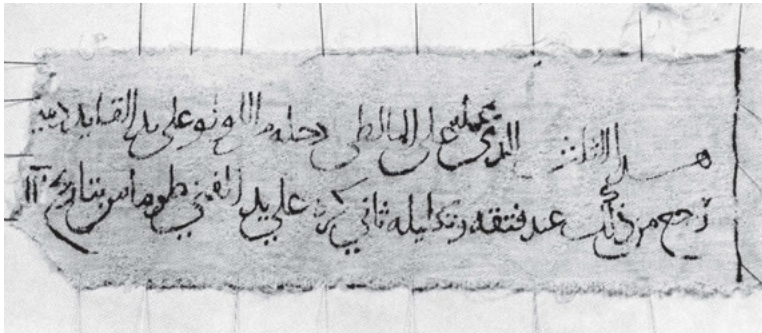


Fig. 9: Handwritten note from the left arm-band of the alb, 1156 (?).

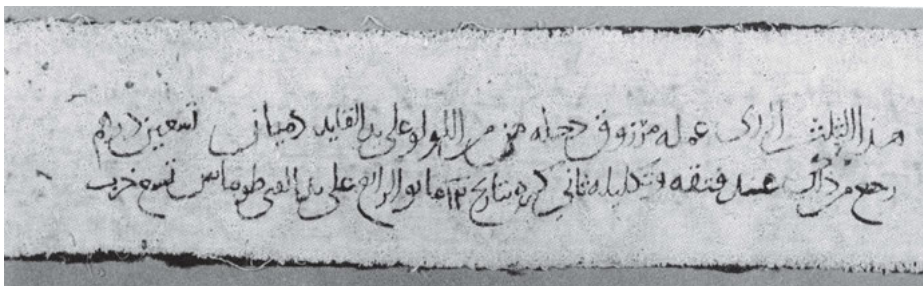


Fig. 10: Handwritten from the right cuff of the alb, 1156 (?).

هذا التلث الذي عمله مرزوق دجله من اللؤلؤ على يد القائد دميان تسعين
درهم رجع من ذلك عند فتنه وتكليله ثاني كرة بتاريخ ١٢ مايو الرابع على يد
الفني طوماس تسع خرب

c/From the right cuff (Fig. 10): ‘This third that Marzūq made, he covered it with pearls on order of the overseer (?) Damiyan. Ninety dirhams [of pearls were used]. He did that again [restarted in that respect, i.e. covered it again in pearls] when it [= the third] was unsewn and decorated the second time, on the 12th May of the fourth [indiction?] on order of the artisan Tūmas. Nine pearls [?] were pierced.’³⁶

The notes allude to the material composition of the ornament still visible on the sleeves. This consists of an elaborate interplay of gold-embroidered motifs and a double row of pearls sewn onto the ground fabric in a repeating pattern of interlocking mandorlas and quadrifoliate shapes with paired griffins and lions (Fig. 11). In addition to the embroidery, the cuffs were further embellished with gemstones. Both the arm-bands and cuffs are made of textile bands of the same width and carry the same type of ornament. In fact, they may well have been produced as separate bands and later cut to fit the garment.³⁷

It is clear that the three handwritten Arabic inscriptions were not meant as ornaments. They are technical notes, and may have increased the value of the textiles by naming the artisans and referring to the precious materials used in the manufacture. As such, they offer a unique insight into the technical aspects of the production of the alb, and even more importantly into the organisation of the workshop, where – judging by their names – craftsmen of Arab and Latin origins were employed, probably both Muslims and Christians. The notes demonstrate, furthermore, that the alb was composed of separately crafted Norman fabrics. The arm-bands and cuffs appear to be the oldest parts of the garment, together with the hidden breast-panel. As Al-Samman has suggested, referring to the passage ‘*ind fatqihī wa taklilīhī thānī karra*’ (lit. ‘upon its opening and its completion for the second time’), they may have belonged to an earlier garment which was taken apart and reassembled. From the temporal indications in the handwritten notes, Al-Samman deduces a tentative date for this operation – the year 1156,³⁸ which would fall during William I’s rule (r. 1154–1166).

The inserts, 10 cm in width, of red and gold-embroidered silk with eagle motifs on both cuffs, on the other hand, have been attributed by Rotraud Bauer to the patronage

³⁶ *Khurab* is translated as ‘pierced’ based on Edward William Lanes’ definition of the term as ‘slit or: having a round hole or perforation.’ Arabic-English Lexicon, vol. 2 (1968), p. 717.

³⁷ This is suggested by BAUER in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 68, p. 267. The analysis of the dyestuff used on those bands, however, shows that only the ornament is continuous, whereas the ground textile seems to have been sewn together from differently prepared pieces. Judith HOFENK DE GRAAF, Marten van BOMMEL, *Meisterfärber am sizilischen Hof*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), pp. 321–22.

³⁸ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 14.



Fig. 11: Arm-band of the alb, detail.

of Frederick II. She bases this hypothesis on their motifs and style, as well as on the commonly voiced assumption that the Norman garments may have had to be adapted for Frederick II's coronation in 1220.³⁹ The same holds true for the large rectangular breast-panel of red samite (Fig. 7), which she also attributes to Frederick II's period on stylistic grounds. The breast-panel is divided into two sections, separated from each other by an inset frame of tablet-woven fabric. Incidentally, the same fabric can also be found on Roger II's blue tunic.⁴⁰ As with the cuffs and arm-bands, the spaces on the breast-panel outlined by the interlocking pattern of pearls have been filled with gold-embroidered motifs, which are vegetal in appearance but far more stylised than on the earlier textiles. Josef Deér has called them '*Stabranken*' (staves with tendrils), and sees them as characteristic elements of the art of Frederick II.⁴¹ While it is plausible to associate this part of the alb with the artistic output of Frederick II's court, the hypothesis cannot be verified at present. Nevertheless, the technical analysis of the different components of the alb provides important information about workshop practice and textile stocks at the Norman and Hohenstaufen courts and, as I shall

³⁹ BAUER in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 68, p. 267.

⁴⁰ BAUER in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 67, p. 264.

⁴¹ Josef DEÉR, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II.*, Bern 1952, p. 67.

argue in the last chapter, also underlines a certain preoccupation with projecting continuity between Norman and Hohenstaufen rules.

Only the embroidered hem of the alb, or orphrey, actually carries an inscription (Figs. 7 and 72). The hem was sewn together from two pieces of plain purple samite and two of undyed samite (each measuring c. 63 × 31 cm), which were embroidered with gold. Each individual piece is subdivided into five bands of ornament, separated by double rows of pearls. The most prominent of these bands is the central one, which is thickly embroidered with a symmetrical pattern of facing griffins (at the front) and lions (at the back) with heavily stylised, symmetrical vegetation. The central band with the figurative pattern is framed at the top and the bottom by two bands with gold-embroidered bilingual inscriptions. The inscription in the uppermost, and rather narrow, band (0.8 cm) is preceded by a cross and embroidered with Latin capital letters. The one in the wider band underneath (2.5 cm) is in Arabic Thuluth script, with occasional additions of scrollwork, also embroidered in gold, filling the spaces between the letter shafts. The same wording is repeated twice on all four pieces.

In the Latin part of the alb's inscription, the separation of words is often indicated by a dot. The letters occupy the entire space of the narrow band, so that there are no further embellishments, except for the cross marking the beginning of the line. The inscription reads:⁴²

'+ OPERATU(M) F[ELI]CI. VRBE PANORMI. XV. ANNO REGNI D(OMI)NI. W(ILLELMI). D(E)I. GR(ATIA) REGIS SICILIE DVCAT(VS). APVLIE ET PRINCIPAT(VS) CAP(VE). FILII REGIS W(ILLELMI) INDICTIO(N)E XIII.'

'Made in the felicitous city of Palermo, in the fifteenth year of the reign of William, king of Sicily by the grace of God, of the duchy of Apulia,⁴³ the principality of Capua, son of King William. In the fourteenth indiction.'

Many words are abbreviated in the inscription, even the names of King William II and his father William I, suggesting that their identity was taken for granted. The emphasis in the short text rather seems to be on providing a clear list of places under the rule of William II, spelling out their political status in relation to the king of Sicily and commemorating the precise moment at which the band was embroidered.

The gender of the term referred to by '*operatum*' is neuter, which rules out a direct reference to an '*alba*', which is feminine. We cannot be sure, therefore, that the four embroidered pieces forming the present hem of the alb were originally intended for an alb. They may have been taken from a stock of textiles kept in the Norman treasury.

⁴² AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 21.

⁴³ Al-Samman translates with 'duke of Apulia', 'prince of Capua'. I have kept a more literal translation. See entries 'ducat' and 'principatus' in: *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (second revised edition), vols 1 and 2 (2002), pp. 473–74 and 1108–09.

However, it is possible to read the neuter case as referring to an embroidered orphrey ('*aurifrisium*'), which would increase the likelihood of the textiles having been produced to adorn an alb. In fact, there are comparable examples of albs with similar orphreys, such as the almost contemporary Utrecht alb.⁴⁴ In any case, given the specific reference in the inscriptions to a date to be commemorated, it is highly probable that these four pieces were intended from the outset to be used as a group.

The Arabic inscription is longer than the Latin one, and three times as large. Some syllables, and even entire words, are superimposed to save space and the few remaining gaps between letters are filled with scrollwork. The text and Al-Samman's reading of it are as follows:⁴⁵

مما أمر بعمله الملك المعظم غليالم الثاني المستعز بالله المعتضد بقدرته
المستنصر بقوته مالك ايطاليه وانكبرده وقلوريه و صقليه معز إمام ر[و]اميه
الناصر للملة النصرانيه بخزائنه المعمورة بدوام العز من تاريخ (...) الرابع عشر
سنة الف و مائة [و] واحد و ثمانين لتاريخ سيدنا يسوع المسيح

'From what ordered to be made the magnificent King William the second, honoured through God, supported through His power, victorious through His force, ruler of Italy and Apulia and Calabria and Sicily, supporter of the Imam of Rumiya, protector of the Christian faith, in his plentiful *khizāna* (chamber, treasury) of lasting glory, in the time of the 14th Ulian (?), in the year 1181 of the time of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.'

The wording of the Arabic inscription coincides with the Latin one in emphasising the territories over which William II ruled, but it is not as precise about the political status of these regions (there are no equivalents to 'duchy' or 'principality') or indeed their exact names. The formulae used in referring to the king are standard phrases, frequently employed in Arabic regions at the time. The different lengths of the Latin and Arabic inscriptions, as well as their different contents, raise questions about their functions on the alb, especially with regards to their possible audiences. Interestingly, the Arabic part of the inscription (but not the Latin one) explicitly refers to the king of Sicily's role as 'supporter of the Pope' and 'protector of the Christian faith',⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Joseph BRAUN, *Die liturgische Gewandung im Occident und Orient nach Ursprung und Entwicklung, Verwendung und Symbolik*, Darmstadt 1964, p. 73.

⁴⁵ AL-SAMMAN (1982), pp. 22–23. *Mimmā amara bi-ʿamalihi al-malik al-muʿazzam Ghuliyālm al-thānī al-mustaʿizz bi-llah, al-muʿtaḍid bi-qudratihi, al-mustanṣir bi-qūwatihi mālik Iṭāliya wa-Ankuburda wa-Qalūriya wa-Ṣiqilliya, muʿizz imām R(ū)mīya, al-nāṣir li-l-milla al-naṣrāniya, bi-khizānatihi al-maʿmūra bi-dūwām al-ʿizz min taʾriḫ (ūliyān?) al-rābiʿ ʿaṣr sana alf wa miʿa (wa-) wāḥid wa-thamānin li-taʾriḫ sayyidinā Yasūʿ al-masiḥ.*

⁴⁶ The epithet *christianorum adiutor et clipeus* (helper and shield of the Christians) first appears in Sicilian documents in late 1129. It was used in the early Latin versions of the royal title and remained part of Roger's Greek title until his death. Horst ENZENSBERGER, *Chanceries, Charters and Administra-*

which may suggest that a different audience, perhaps a Muslim one, was intended for the Arabic inscription.

This is the only bilingual inscription found on any textiles of Sicilian provenance. There are a few remaining Egyptian textiles with Arabic and Coptic inscriptions, which will be introduced in the comparative Chapter 2. However, multilingual textile inscriptions generally appear to have been rare. The numerous examples of multilingual public writing from Norman Sicily – including administrative documents – hint at a special relation between the production of the alb and the Norman chancery, which is addressed in detail in the final chapter.

1.1.3 The Stockings

Like the alb, the Sicilian stockings have not received much scholarly attention, except for Al-Samman's thorough study of their inscriptions. The stockings (60 × 34–36 cm) consist of two parts (Fig. 12): a gold-embroidered main body with plain red ribbons, and olive-green bands of silk-tapestry with Arabic inscriptions. These inscriptions allow the tapestries to be dated to the period of William II, the later twelfth century.⁴⁷

The embroidered ornament on the stockings' ground fabric shows an abstract pattern of interlocking quadrifoils, each containing a cross-shaped star or blossom in their centre. Bauer has suggested that this part of the stockings may have been produced later than the inscribed bands, possibly under Frederick II.⁴⁸ Recent scientific analyses have in fact revealed that the red dyestuff and the samite weave of the stockings are identical to that used for the shoes made for Frederick II,⁴⁹ suggesting that they may well have been produced at the same time. However, as for the alb, the suggestion that it may have been produced for the emperor's coronation in 1220⁵⁰ is plausible but cannot be verified: none of these textiles – shoes, stockings, or indeed the alb's breast-panel – can be firmly dated. However, if the stylistic argument in favour of a later dating of the shoes and stockings were accepted, we could assume that the inscribed, tapestry-woven pieces were taken from a stock of Norman textiles, or possibly from a different garment and reused in the workshop of the Hohenstaufen

tion in Norman Italy, in: Graham LOUD and Alexander METCALFE (eds), *The Society of Norman Italy*, Leiden 2002, p. 137; and Alexander METCALFE, *The Muslims of Sicily under Christian Rule*, in: *ibid.*, p. 303.

⁴⁷ Isabelle DOLEZALEK, *Comparing Forms, Contextualising Functions: Arabic Inscriptions on Textiles of the Norman King William II and Fatimid ʿīrāz*, in: Juliane VON FIRCKS and Regula SCHORTA (eds), *Oriental Silks in Medieval Europe* (Riggisberger Berichte 21), Riggisberg 2016, pp. 80–91; BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 69; AL-SAMMAN (1982), pp. 25–31.

⁴⁸ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 69, p. 273.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 273–74.

⁵⁰ The hypothesis that Frederick II may have worn the stockings and other Norman garments at his coronation in Rome is voiced also in FILLITZ (1954), p. 25.



Fig. 12: Stockings, late 12th- early 13th century, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. n. XIII 12.



Fig. 13: Tapestry-woven inscription on the left stocking.

King Fredrick II at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The question of whether such ‘reuses’, which can be observed also on the alb, for example, ought to be considered the results merely of the availability of textiles, or whether they may have had political connotations too, will be discussed in the last chapter. The main concern at present, however, is the written ornament on the tapestry bands from the Norman period.

In contrast to the inscriptions on the mantle and alb, the ones on the stockings are woven. The inscriptions occupy the entire length of the tapestry-woven bands. Vegetal scrolls are interwoven with the script and there are decorative dots between the letters, some of which appear to function as diacritical marks.⁵¹ The letters and vegetal scrolls are woven with *Häutchengold* (gold thread with a leather core), as are the textiles used in the lining of Roger II’s mantle. Their contrast with the darker olive-green ground is emphasised by red and white silk lines framing their outlines.

There are no obvious markers to identify the left and right side of the stockings. I shall therefore start by describing the one which Al-Samman identifies as the ‘right’ stocking, on which the inscription begins. Al-Samman’s transcription of the inscription at the top of the right stocking (h. 7 cm) is as follows (Fig. 13):⁵²

⁵¹ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 25.

⁵² Ibid., p. 25. ‘*Bi-rasm al-malik al-mu’azzam al-quḍus Ghuliyālm.*’ The translation of the inscription seems fairly straightforward, but Al-Samman cautiously points out that words such as *al-mu’azzam* can have multiple meanings. Ibid., p. 25, n. 96a. The complex meanings of the epithet *al-quḍus* are discussed in Jeremy JOHNS, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Diwan*, Cambridge 2002, p. 137.

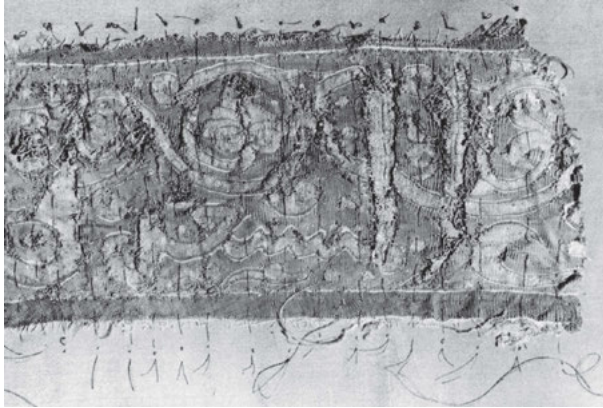


Fig. 14: Tapestry-woven inscription on the left stocking, detail, photograph taken during conservation.

برسم الملك المعظم القدس غليالم

‘For the king, the glorious, holy William.’

The tapestry-woven band at the top of the left stocking is made to approximately the same measurements as the right one (46 × 9 cm, with a 7 cm inscription). It is woven in the same technique and with the same materials (Fig. 14). The vegetal scrolls, however, are visible only above the letters and are cut off at the bottom, in contrast to the right stocking, where scrolls above the letters and some simpler tendrils underneath the script can be seen. Al-Samman remarks that the letter shafts are thicker and the scrollwork less elegant than on the right stocking, and concludes from this that the two bands were probably made by different weavers.⁵³ His transcription contains a few additions where the letters were no longer legible:⁵⁴

المستعز با(ل)له) ال[م]عت(ضد) بقدرته ا(لم)ستنصر بق[وته]

‘The one who is honoured by God, supported by His power, victorious through His strength.’

There is no clear indication in the first part of the inscription which of the two Norman Williams this refers to. William I reigned from the death of Roger II in 1154 until 1166, William II from 1166 until 1189. It is, however, obvious from the title of the king as it appears in the second inscription, *al-mustaʿizz bi-llāh*, that William II is meant – this is his official title as it appears on contemporary documents. His predecessor

⁵³ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 27.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 27: ‘*Al-mustaʿizz bi-llāh al-[m]uʿta(ḍid) bi-qudratiḥi a(l-m)ustanṣir bi-q[ūwatiḥi].*’

William I was referred to as *al-hādī bi-amr allāh*.⁵⁵ The Thuluth style of the stockings' script is remarkably similar to that on the alb. Al-Samman therefore proposes ascribing the conception of the inscriptions, executed in different techniques, to the same calligrapher.⁵⁶ Even though it may not be possible to confirm this hypothesis from the sources currently known, the similarity of scripts used on the alb and stockings suggests that they followed a set of codifications which, as will be shown in the last chapter, is probably also related to the Norman chancery.

Some errors in the formation of the letters led Al-Samman to believe that the weavers themselves may have been unable to read Arabic and were merely trying to reproduce something given to them as a model.⁵⁷ This is an interesting detail, considering the argument put forward by Ugo Monneret de Villard that weaving at the Norman court was in Byzantine hands, while embroideries were usually done by artisans trained in the Arab tradition.⁵⁸ Al-Samman reaches this conclusion from misplaced diacritical marks and the absence of a vertical stroke on the letter *ẓ* (*ẓā'*), for example, which actually changes the word entirely.⁵⁹ Reading the opening words '*birasm*' also requires some intuition because the last two letters, *س* (*sīn*) and *م* (*mīm*), were drawn in a highly unusual way, and because vegetal ornament and letters sometimes merge, compromising the legibility of the letters. However, such a division of labour according to the origins of the craftsmen in the Norman textile workshops seems unlikely, given, for example, the evidence of the handwritten notes in the alb, on which the names of Arab and Latin craftsmen appear together.

In addition to their mistakes and misshapen letters, the stockings' inscriptions are also hard to decipher because of their size, their ornamental entanglements and their actual position when the stockings are worn. Visibility and invisibility, and legibility and illegibility are, in fact, important themes to address when looking at the reception of the textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily. The constant oscillation in the Norman textile inscriptions between a theoretical legibility and complete invisibility, perhaps accompanied by the knowledge of the presence of writing, is an important aspect of the Norman textile inscriptions. This will be discussed in Chapter 3, together with the circumstances under which the garments may have been seen and by whom.

⁵⁵ JOHNS (2002), p. 269.

⁵⁶ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Ugo MONNERET DE VILLARD, La tessitura palermitana sotto i Normanni e i suoi rapporti con l'arte bizantina, in: *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, Vatican 1946, vol. 3, pp. 464–89.

⁵⁹ Regula Forster pointed out to me that this may also be an appearance of local dialect in the inscriptions and need not necessarily be a sign of linguistic incompetence.

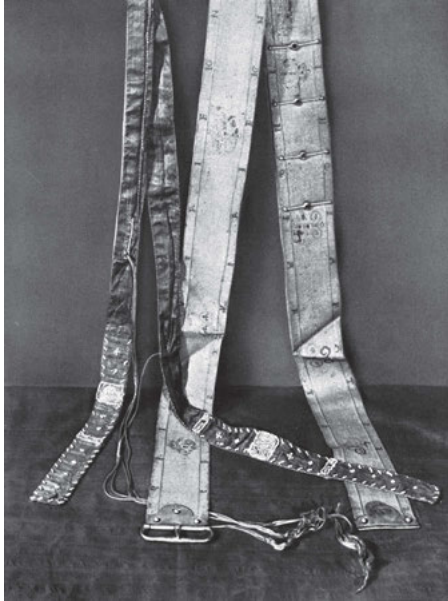


Fig. 15: Sword belt, tablet-woven, 12th c., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. n. XIII 9.

1.1.4 The Ceremonial Sword Belt

Another inscribed piece among the imperial regalia in Vienna which has been attributed to the Norman Sicilian workshops is the sword belt (Fig. 15).⁶⁰ Although its inscription is not in Arabic, but in Latin, it is included in this overview of inscribed textiles from Norman Sicily since it also sheds light on the status and functions of textile inscriptions at the Norman court. The fact that Arabic was not the only language used in Norman courtly inscriptions, but that in public inscriptions Latin – and occasionally Greek and Judaeo-Arabic – were also used, offers a good counter example contextualising the hypotheses in this book about the specific function of Arabic textile inscriptions.

The belt, woven with silk and gold-threads, is 189 cm and 6.3 cm wide. The metal buckle and reinforcements seem to have been added subsequently, possibly in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.⁶¹ The fabric is divided into three bands separated by a faint line of brownish silk. The central band, the largest, is decorated with ten small stylised trees, placed at intervals of c. 17–20 cm, some of which are surrounded by quadrupeds, while others include birds.⁶² On the other two bands an inscription, the same in both cases, is woven into the fabric in widely spaced Latin letters (a trans-

⁶⁰ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat 73.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁶² Daniël de Jonghe remarked upon the symmetrical repetition of the motifs along two axes. See his *Stof uit de kist: De middeleeuwse textielschat uit de abdij van Sint-Truiden*, Leiden 1991, p. 73.

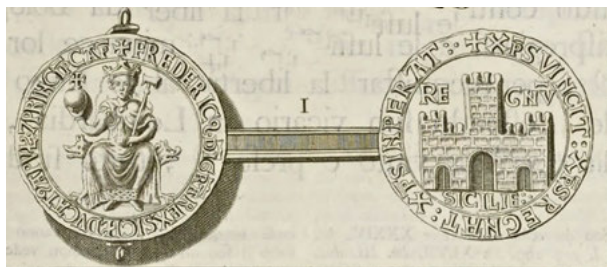


Fig. 16: Royal bull of Frederick II.

cription and translation is also given in the appendix). The individual letters appear at intervals of c. 4–5 cm and are very small and only slightly darker than the ground, making them difficult to decipher. The two inscriptions in the upper and lower bands of the sword belt run parallel to each other and read:⁶³

CRISTVS RIEGNAT CRISTVS INQPARAT DEVS

‘Christ reigns, Christ governs, God.’

As can be seen, for instance, from an illustration in Francesco Daniele’s description of Frederick II’s sepulchre, the same phrase is also found on royal bulls, used on the legal documents of Norman Sicily (Fig. 16),⁶⁴ and, most importantly, it belongs to the text of the coronation lauds.⁶⁵ Yet the first part of the phrase, spoken during the coronation ceremonies – ‘*Christus vincit*’ – is missing on the textile.

Interestingly, Christoph Gottlieb von Murr’s reading of the belt’s inscription from 1790 includes this first part of the lauds,⁶⁶ which is also lacking from the copy of the belt. This copy was commissioned as a pendant to the original regalia a few years earlier, in 1764, for the coronation of Joseph II as the Roman–German king.⁶⁷ If the belt was shortened at one particular moment, it must have been before the copy was made, so that von Murr’s reading was either influenced by his knowledge of the usual coronation phrase and therefore inaccurate, or taken from an earlier reading of the

⁶³ I have given my own reading here. In the catalogue, the second phrase is transcribed as ‘*Cristvs riehgnat*.’ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 73, p. 281.

⁶⁴ DANIELE (1784), p. 85.

⁶⁵ Conf. Chapter 3.5. BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 73, p. 281. The coronation lauds continue to be sung every 28 January (the date of death of the Emperor Charlemagne) at the occasion of the *Karlsmesse* in Frankfurt Cathedral, where the emperors and kings of the Holy Roman Empire used to be crowned. I owe this information to Gero Dolezalek.

⁶⁶ ‘*CRISTUS RIEGNAT CRISTUS INMPARAT DDEUS CRISTUS VINCIT*.’ See VON MURR (1790), p. 51.

⁶⁷ Anna Th. SCHWINGER, *Der Ornat Kaiser Franz’ I. Stephan von Lothringen. Barockkopien nach dem Krönungsornat des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004) pp. 137–53.

inscription, which he did not verify in person. As I shall argue in the second part of this chapter, the role played by knowledge and expectations associated with certain inscriptions is key to the reception of the Norman textile inscriptions.

1.2 Funerary Garments from Norman Palermo

The second major group of textiles associated with the Sicilian court was found and documented when the royal sepulchres in Palermo Cathedral were opened in 1781. Like the textiles of the Vienna group, these textiles provide an invaluable source for the history of medieval textiles, especially since they can be securely related to Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily. Although we cannot be sure that the different textile parts used to produce the funerary garments were of Sicilian provenance, we know that they were used there at the time of the burials. They provide an important insight into the forms and styles chosen as a representative image – in this case posthumous – of the Norman rulers.

The funerary textiles, some fragments of which have entered the collections of the British Museum,⁶⁸ are mainly known from the descriptions and illustrations in Francesco Daniele's report of the opening of the royal tombs. His work, entitled *I regali sepolchri del duomo di Palermo riconosciuti e illustrati* (Naples 1784),⁶⁹ contains detailed accounts of the content and state of preservation of the sarcophagi of King Roger II, Emperor Henry VI and his wife Constance – Roger's daughter – as well as their son Frederick II and his wife Constance of Aragon. Each of the tombs is treated in a separate chapter introduced by a short historical biography of the royal figure; this is followed by a description of the body, and there are plates illustrating the finds inside the tombs at the end of the volume. These illustrations are particularly interesting as they provide detailed renderings of the garments and other objects found surrounding the bodies, as well as a general picture of the arrangement of some of the bodies inside the tombs.

According to Daniele, some of the sarcophagi had been opened before the eighteenth century. The tombs of Henry VI and Constance of Aragon, for example, were opened on 18 October 1491 by order of the Viceroy Don Ferdinando de Acugna. However, the attempt proved so unpopular with the people of Palermo that it had to be interrupted and the sarcophagi resealed.⁷⁰ Frederick II's tomb, too, appears to have

⁶⁸ The textiles include one fragment of a crimson silk-brocade with a pattern of deer and birds (BM Inv. 1878, 0907.4); fragments of a shoe (Inv. 1878, 0907.5); and three fragments of an inscribed silk-band from Henry VI's crown (Inv. 1878, 0907.1–3). They were brought to England by Rev. Greville Chester in 1878. Reiner HAUSHER, Christian VÄTERLEIN (eds), *Die Zeit der Staufer: Geschichte – Kunst – Kultur* (Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum, 1977), Stuttgart 1977–79, vol. 1, p. 618.

⁶⁹ DANIELE (1784).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

been opened twice, to accommodate two more bodies.⁷¹ Recently, a non-interventionist analysis was carried out on the sarcophagus of the emperor without removing its lid.⁷² A limited number of samples were extracted to assess the level of insect infestation, analyse the DNA of the three bodies inside the sarcophagus, and examine some fibres of what remains of the various types of textiles. But as a result of the restricted number of further inventions, Daniele still provides our main source of evidence for the garments in which Emperor Frederick II, his wife and his ancestors were buried (excepting the few fragments from Henry VI's sarcophagus in the British Museum collection).

This second group clearly complements the surviving ceremonial garments, yet it has been somewhat overlooked in the secondary literature on the Sicilian textiles. In the following discussion, the individual textiles from the funerary group will therefore be treated in some detail in compensation. Only very few of these textiles actually carry inscriptions, but the textiles themselves provide valuable evidence for the contextualisation of the inscribed garments within the broader textile scenery of Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily.

1.2.1 Roger II's Funerary Garments with Human and Animal Figures

Roger II's body is reported to have been found in an advanced state of decomposition and the content of the sarcophagus was in such disorder that Daniele assumed it had previously been opened.⁷³ This is his description of the garments in which the king was laid to rest:⁷⁴

'Long shreds of yellow, much entangled cloth and some others with a woven frieze of gold at their edge. Moreover, a piece of the mantle, or royal *paludamento*, which was of a yellowish colour in parts, and another part, which formed its hem, was crafted with utmost subtlety showing human and animal figures of various colours, beautiful to the eye, but drawn in a strange and crude manner.'

The illustration of the fragment from the hem of the royal mantle in the appendix of Daniele's work confirms that the textile described above would have been one related to those lining Roger II's mantle in Vienna (Fig. 17). The fact that this type of textile

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 100.

⁷² Maria ANDALORO, Maria VAROLI PIAZZA (eds), *Il sarcofago dell'Imperatore: Studi, ricerche e indagini sulla tomba di Federico II nella Cattedrale di Palermo*, Palermo 2002. The volume contains excellent images.

⁷³ DANIELE (1784), p. 23.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 22–23. '*Lunghi stracci di velo giallo, molto annodati tra di loro, ed altri aventi nell'estremità alcun fregio di oro intessuto. Si era ancor conservato un pezzo della veste, o paludamento regale, parte di color tendente al giallo, e parte, che ne formava il lembo, era lavorato con sottilissimo artefizio a figure di uomini, e di animali di varj colori, vaghi a vedere, ma di strano e rozzo disegno.*'



Fig. 17: Gold-woven textile from the sarcophagus of Roger II.

was used both on the inner hem of Roger's ceremonial mantle and on the mantle in which the king was laid to rest suggests a rather practical approach to the textile stock in the royal wardrobe. Even if the mantle had been made specifically to serve for the king's funeral, its design apparently did not differ greatly from that of the workshop's normal output. Roger may also simply have been buried in a mantle which he had worn before.⁷⁵

In her analysis of Roger II's mantle, Bauer has suggested that the unusual iconographic motifs of the lining may have been used to symbolise the earthly realm, while the symmetry and harmonious composition of the mantle's exterior may have expressed an ideal realm.⁷⁶ This is one possibility among others which have been suggested for the meaning of these tapestries on Roger II's royal garments. An apotropaic function has also been suggested for the mantle's lining,⁷⁷ an idea that might be con-

⁷⁵ Evidence from other royal burials shows that textiles used for the corpses did not necessarily have to be new. Rudolph IV (1339–1365), for example, was buried in an Ilkhanid textile that would have been more than thirty years old at the time of his death. However, his funerary textiles were expressly sewn together to serve for his burial. Markus RITTER, Cloth of Gold from West Asia in a Late Medieval European Context: The Abū Sa'īd Textile in Vienna – Princely Funeral and Cultural Transfer, in: Juliane VON FIRCKS and Regula SCHORTA (eds), *Oriental Silks in Medieval Europe* (Riggisberger Berichte 21), Riggisberg 2016, pp. 231–51.

⁷⁶ BAUER (1994), p. 280.

⁷⁷ Cilgia CARATSCH, Der Futterstoff des Mantels König Rogers II. von Sizilien, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), p. 131.

firmed to some extent by the use of similar textiles in the royal tomb. However, a large quantity of related fragments has been recorded.⁷⁸ All of them appear to have been appreciated for their precious materials and style, while – in my view – any meaning or function of this type of textile is dependent upon the context of its use. There is no mention of other ornaments on the remaining sections of garment found in Roger II's sarcophagus and no mention of inscriptions.

1.2.2 Henry VI's Crown with Arabic Inscriptions

The sarcophagus of Henry VI (1165–1197) was found in a better state, with the body almost entirely intact.⁷⁹ The garments found in his sepulchre included two gloves, stockings and shoes and an inscribed crown, which Daniele likens to those worn by Roger II and William II in the mosaics of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and Monreale Cathedral (Fig. 39).⁸⁰ Interestingly, in contrast to the other rulers, Henry VI was buried in a shroud, rather than ceremonial garments. According to Daniele's description and the accompanying illustration, his body was covered with:⁸¹

'A yellowish shroud, the palm-wide hem of which was crimson in colour with some eagles, deer and gold-woven foliage.'

This textile has been related to a fragment now kept in the British Museum (Inv. n. 1878,09074) together with the remains of a shoe (Inv. n. 1878, 09075) and those of the crown (Inv. n. 1878,09071–3). This '*corona*', or crown, is described as follows:⁸²

'This crown is made of yellow silk fabric with a woven frieze of various arabesques, as beautiful as those of Raphael, surrounding it, with roundels in which are found these Kufic words [insertion in vocalised Arabic], that is *divitiae et felix eventus et praerogativa*, and on the back there are two silk bands hanging down, which were also crafted with arabesques, but by a different hand.'

There is an illustration of the artefact in Daniele (Fig. 18); this indeed shows a band of alternating inscribed roundels and 'arabesques' (which I assume to refer to vegetal

⁷⁸ Nobiles Officinae (2006), cat. III.1–III.17.

⁷⁹ DANIELE (1784), p. 41.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 46. '*Un drappo di color gialliccio; il cui lembo all'altezza di un palmo era di color chermisi con alcune aquile, e cervette, e fogliami intessuti ad oro.*'

⁸² Ibid., p. 46. '*È di drappo di seta color giallo, ed ha d'ognintorno intessuto ad oro un fregio di varj rabeschi, belli quanto quelli di Raffaello; con certi scudetti rotondi, ne' quali son queste parole cufiche [...] cioè divitiae, & felix eventus, & prerogativa; e dalla parte di dietro le pendono due bendoni di seta, lavorati similmente a rabeschi, da una mano però diversa.*'

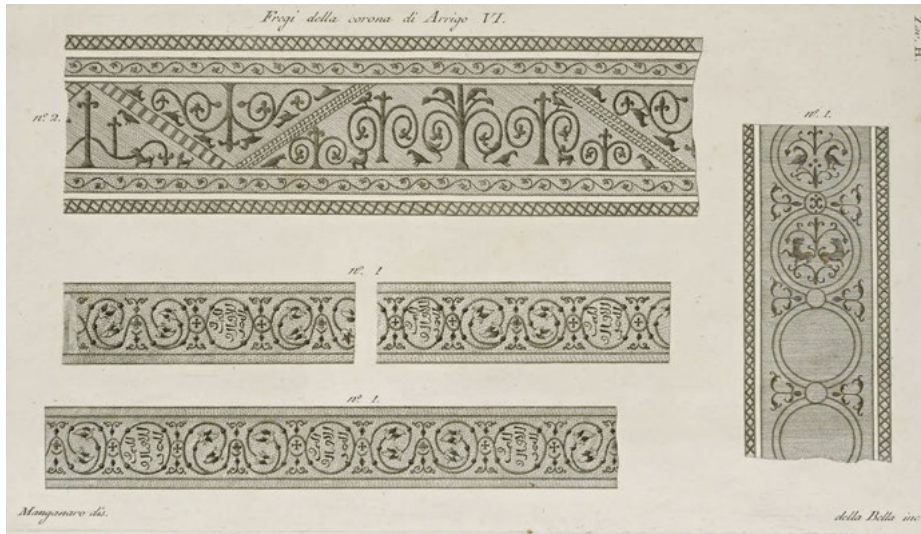


Fig. 18: Textile fragments from Henry VI's sarcophagus.

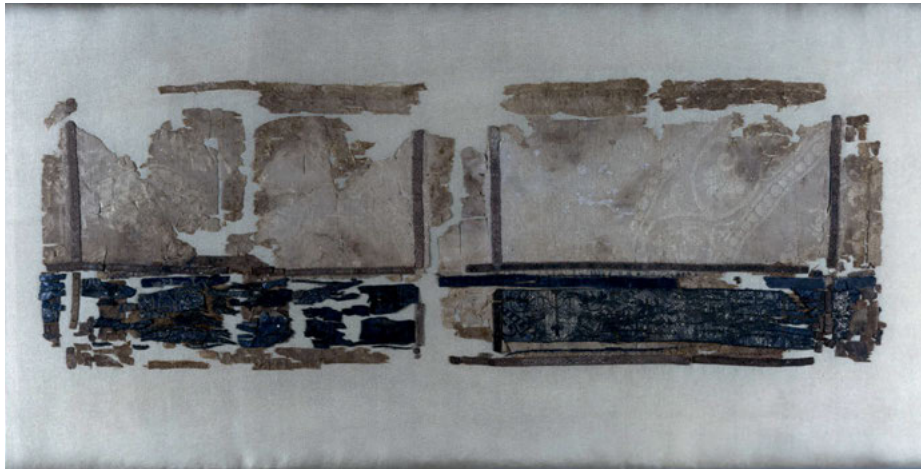


Fig. 19: Textile fragments recovered in the tomb of Henry VI, British Museum.

scrolls) placed in regularly woven succession. The fragments conserved at the British Museum, however, are not discernably inscribed (Fig. 19), and some of them are differently ornamented with a row of tangent circles, so it may be that these are the two silk bands that Daniele saw at the back of the crown.

1.2.3 Constance of Sicily and Constance of Aragon

The body of Constance of Sicily (1154–1198), Frederick II's mother and Roger II's daughter, was found with gloves, fragments of yellow cloth and a seemingly different type of cloth covering the legs, as well as a belt and shoes that showed the signs of once having been finely embroidered and embellished with precious stones:⁸³

'Two gloves of cloth (linen?), many straps of fine yellowish fabric and another long strap, which looks like a belt. The legs were dressed in cloth and the feet covered with shoes of the same material, which were closed above the foot with silken laces. Two openings, embellished with embroidery, which appear to formerly have been ornated with gems, could be observed on their uppers.'

Nonetheless, Daniele observed that the sepulchre, which had evidently been opened previously, was in a relatively poor state of conservation.

The sarcophagus of Constance of Aragon (1179–1222), on the other hand, was found in a state of reasonable preservation with a vast array of textiles and jewellery still in place. According to Daniele and the artefacts kept in the treasury in Palermo Cathedral,⁸⁴ the objects found in her sepulchre were of exquisite quality. Constance's long blonde hair was covered with a cap, and the whole body draped in fragments of a crimson robe, adorned at its hem with friezes, embroidered or woven with pearls and thin sections of gold.⁸⁵

Her diadem (Fig. 20), found in a wooden casket by her feet and now also kept in Palermo Cathedral, seems to have been heavily remodelled in the course of the centuries. It is decorated with precious stones, one of which bears an Arabic inscription that is wrongly translated by Daniele as saying '*Deus, Iesus, Maria sunt spes mea*'.⁸⁶ The reasoning that led to this misreading is interesting, as it suggests that the person who engraved this garnet was a Christian Arab. However, the correct translation of what is written on the stone is 'in God Isa Ibn Gibair trusts',⁸⁷ an odd phrase to be

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 64–65. '[...] *due guanti di drappo, molti stracci di velo di color gialliccio, ed un altro lungo straccio, che parve essere una cintura. Le gambe erano vestite di drappo, ed i piedi calzati di scarpe similmente di drappo, le quali venivan fermate al piede da cordoncini di seta annodati; e nel tomajo di esse si osservarono due aperture lavorate a ricamo, che davano indizio di essere state una volta ornate di gioie [...]*.'

⁸⁴ The diadem and the two fragments from the hem of Constance's garment, which are decorated with enamel, silver gilt and pearls, are kept in the Palermo Cathedral treasury. Claudia GUASTELLA, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VI.5–VI.7.

⁸⁵ '*Tutto il corpo poi era involto in una lacera veste di drappo color chermisi, all'estremità adorno di alcuni fregi ricamati o tessuti con piccole perle, e laminette sottilissime d'oro*.' DANIELE (1784), p. 80.

⁸⁶ Daniele refers to a reading and translation by Tychsen. Ibid., p. 81, note t.

⁸⁷ GUASTELLA, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VI.5, p. 371 ('in Dio Isà Ibn Gibair s'affida'). The name might also be read as Jubayr, a more common Arabic name.

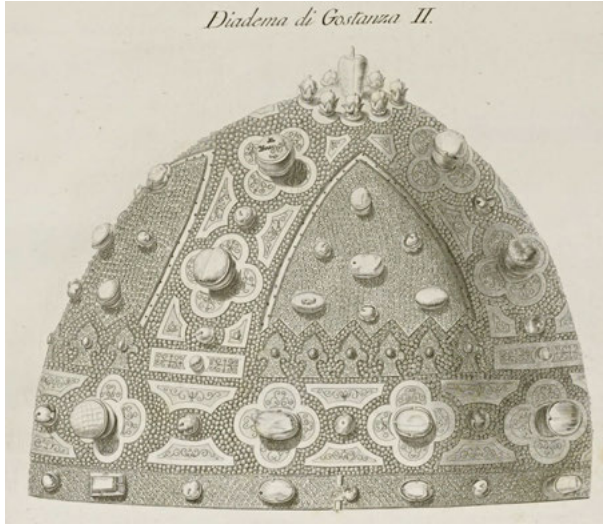


Fig. 20: Diadem of Constance of Aragon, c.1222.

given a prominent place on Constance's diadem, since it bears no obvious relation to the court. The engraved stone appears to have been reused, and possibly had an amuletic function.⁸⁸

1.2.4 Frederick II and the Myth of the Cistercian Funerary Robes

The last tomb in Daniele's account is the Emperor Frederick II's. According to Daniele, the emperor's body was extremely well preserved. Contrary to Matthew Paris' report, according to which the excommunicated emperor had been buried in the garments of a Cistercian monk,⁸⁹ Frederick II's body was found dressed in full regalia, including an alb, dalmatic and mantle, as well as a belt, stockings and spurs (Fig. 74). Daniele even speculated that these could have been his coronation vestments.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ On the reuse of amuletic stones on Christian objects, see, for example, Gia TOUSSAINT, *Heiliges Gebein und edler Stein: Der Edelsteinschmuck von Reliquiaren im Spiel mittelalterlicher Wahrnehmung*, in: *Das Mittelalter 8* (2003), pp. 41–66; Avinoam SHALEM, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West*, Frankfurt am Main, p. 306.

⁸⁹ *'Obiit autem circa eadem tempora principum mundi maximus Frethericus, stupor quoque mundi et immutator mirabilis, absolutus a sententia qua innodabatur, assumpto, ut dicitur, habitu Cisterciensium, et mirifice compunctus et humiliatus.'* See: Matthaei Parisiensis *Chronica Majora* (1248–1259), ed. by Henry RICHARDS LUARD, Cambridge 2012, vol. 5, p. 190.

⁹⁰ DANIELE (1784), p. 102. *'Il suo corpo è vestito de' medesimi abiti, co' quali [...] era stato consegnato Imperadore; che son diversi senza fallo da quelli, che serbansi tuttavia con le altre insegne imperiali in Norimberga [...].'*

Daniele describes the three main overgarments in detail, including observations on their material, colour and techniques of manufacture. Two of the garments, the dalmatic and *pluviale*, are particularly sumptuous. They are made of red silk, decorated gold and precious stones, but do not appear to bear any inscriptions.⁹¹ Frederick II's legs are described as covered by linen leggings as well as silken stockings and shoes. The remainder of the description is concerned with the additional regalia discovered in the emperor's sarcophagus, such as the sword and its woven silk belt with figures and a ring. Together with the engraving of Frederick II's body as it was found in the sarcophagus, this particularly long description gives a precise idea of the image which must have been considered desirable for the final remembrance of the emperor.

The third overgarment in Daniele's description is an alb, which is made of linen. This is of particular interest here because of its embroidered Arabic inscription:⁹²

'[...] Here was observed, underneath the left upper arm, an embroidered cross in red silk. At the hems surrounding the collar and cuffs, this alb is ornated with different friezes; in fact, on the cuffs there is a gold-embroidered inscription in Kufic characters. It is the same on both cuffs; and, once the script was diligently taken note of, the Signore Prince of Torremuzza sent a copy of it to our common friend Signore Murr from Nuremberg, who, having commissioned a woodcut of it, procured an explanation of it by Signore Tychsen [...].'

A fragment of the embroidered cuff of Frederick II's alb is illustrated in remarkable detail on a plate in the appendix to Daniele's monograph (Fig. 21). The Arabic inscription on this piece belongs to a larger embroidered part, subdivided – as with the embroidered hem of William II's alb – into parallel bands of varying width which are filled with different types of ornament. The first band from the top is relatively narrow and contains a scrollwork frieze. Following this is the second band, almost twice as large, which contains the main part of the Arabic inscription.

Contrary to Daniele's text and the title of the plate, however, this inscription is not in Kufic style, but in Thuluth. The inscribed band is given a pronounced vertical rhythm; many of the letter shafts are elongated and have an indentation at the top. In some places, as with the Arabic inscription on William's alb, words are superimposed and diacritical marks have been interspersed with the vertical shafts, thus filling all spaces between the letters. The second band contains the same type of vegetal ornament as the first, so that the inscription is framed symmetrically. The same applies to

⁹¹ See also Ivana BRUNO, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VI.8.

⁹² DANIELE (1784), p. 102. '[...] Vi si osservò sotto all'omero sinistro a ricamo in seta, che tenea ancor del color rosso una croce. All'estremità del collo, e delle maniche è quest'alba ornata di diversi fregi; anzi nelle maniche havvi ricamata a oro un'iscrizione in caratteri cufici. Essa è la stessa in ambedue; e, rilevatane diligentemente la scrittura, ne fu una copia trasmessa dal sig. principe di Torremuzza al nostro comune amico il sig. Murr di Norimberga; il quale, fattala prima intagliare in legno, ne procurò l'interpretazione dal sig. Tychsen [...].'



Fig. 21: Inscribed cuff of Frederick II's funerary alb.

the second inscribed section of the cuff, which is set between two narrow bands of stylised foliage. The inscribed band consists of a frieze alternating between geometrical medallions and cartouches with Arabic inscriptions. This distribution of ornament into symmetrical bands is reminiscent of Islamic fabrics, and – in this particular case – resembles some embroidered Ayyubid examples, a correspondence which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Daniele's plate gives equal attention to the inscription as to the original function of the textile as a cuff. It shows, for example, that buttons and loops were fastened to the two decorative bands surrounding the inscriptions, but gives only partial representations of two of the inscribed cartouches. The woodcuts made from the copies of the inscriptions that were sent to Nuremberg, in contrast, are reproduced completely in a very early publication on the mantle by the German scholar von Murr (Fig. 22).⁹³ Plates II, III, IV and V show the inscription relatively clearly, but are twice

⁹³ Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, *Erläuterung der arabischen Umschrift, welche in goldenen karmatischen Schriftzügen auf den unteren Saum des kaiserlichen Mantels gesticket ist, der in Nürnberg*

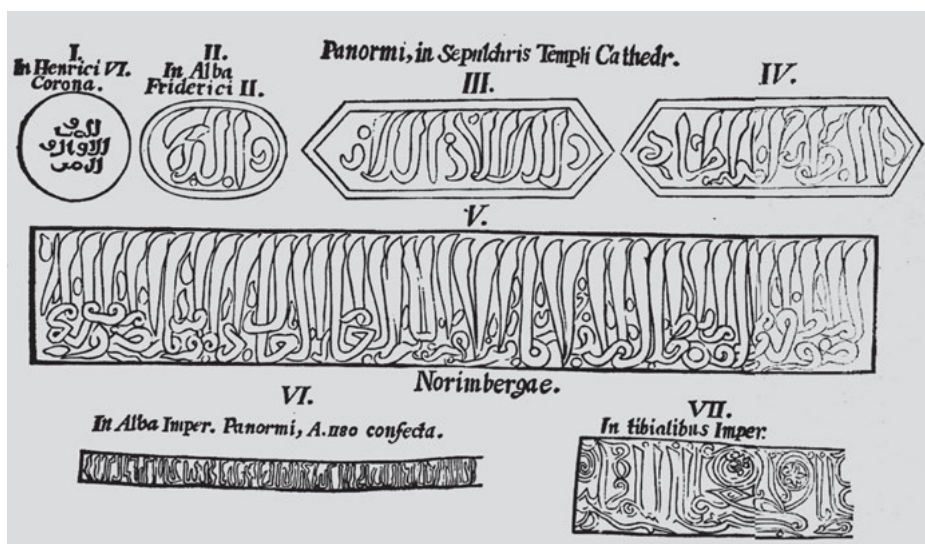


Fig. 22: Arabic inscription on Frederick II's funerary alb, woodcut.

removed from the original textile through the transcription and subsequent rendering in woodcut. Nevertheless, the inscription is remarkably faithful to the engraving published in Daniele, so if the copyists were not familiar with Arabic – as is likely – they must have been instructed to copy the letters as precisely as possible. The same does not apply to the shape of the cartouches in which the inscriptions were placed; in von Murr's woodcuts their outlines have been simplified to the extreme.

Actually reading the inscriptions is extremely difficult, not only because the letters were given only very limited space on the textile itself, but also because of the various stages of copying, during which – regardless of the great care the copyists seem to have taken – details important for differentiating between the letters may have been lost. Daniele gives a full reproduction of Oluf Tychsen's letter translating the inscription.⁹⁴ Tychsen gave the four segments of the alb's inscription as follows:

*'Imperium Allemanicum mite est.
Hoc est munus pro Othone (Othone IV?).
Amico, hospitali, victorioso, inclyto, strenuo, liberali,
vigilante, magno, fideli excellenti, sapiente, justo,
protectore, hospitali, victorioso, inclyto.'*

unter den Reichsinsignien aufbewahrt wird; nebst Herrn Hofraths Tychsen neuer Dechiffrierung derselben, in: *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur* 10 (1781), pp. 318–74.

⁹⁴ The letter is addressed to the prince of Torremuzzo. DANIELE (1784), p. 104, note o.

According to Tychsen, three of the words in the last part of the inscription (beginning with *wālī* – ‘*amico*’) – consisting of an enumeration of epithets typically used for Islamic rulers – are repeated ‘*ad fugam vacui*’, in order to fill the remaining space.⁹⁵ This is reminiscent of the embroidered hem of William II’s alb, where the inscription is also repeated. Against Tychsen’s very formalist argument, which naturally assumes that repetitions occur in order to fill space, the last chapter of this book asserts that the repeated textile inscriptions on this royal garment had a legitimising function and might well have been used to express consent symbolically.

Although it is difficult to discern the exact shapes of the letters, Tychsen’s trained eye can be relied upon for a general impression of the content of the laudative enumeration in the longer part of the inscription on the cuffs. But his interpretation of the remainder of the inscription, embroidered into the cartouches in the lower band, is more problematic when compared with the engraving and woodcut. In particular, the phrase ‘*hoc est munus pro Othone IV*’ is a peculiar inclusion in the reading of the Arabic inscription.⁹⁶ It appears to stem from Tychsen’s sophisticated interpretation of the letter *dal* in the inscription as an Arabic numerical value – an attempt to make it signify ‘four’ – and, as I shall argue in the second part of this chapter, from his desire to explain the presence of textiles with Arabic inscriptions in Frederick II’s tomb as symbolising Muslim submission.

1.3 Byzantine Weavers – Arab Embroiderers? Textiles Associated with Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Sicily

Although we do not know whether the textiles found in the royal sarcophagi were of Sicilian manufacture or imported, the two groups of garments offer a range of textile examples in different techniques that were certainly associated with the Norman and Hohenstaufen courts. They are used for comparison when identifying further textiles. The Italian catalogue of the *Nobiles Officinae* exhibition, for example, identifies several dozen textiles which may be related to the Sicilian court.⁹⁷ These attributions are mostly made on stylistic grounds, taking into account the patterns and iconography of the textiles, and their relation to known royal Sicilian garments and fabrics. However, a single Norman style cannot easily be identified and scholarly debates have circled around the indebtedness of Sicilian textile production to the Byzantine or Arab traditions.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Words that can be deciphered in the inscription with some certainty include *al-muzaffar* (the Victorious), *al-‘alīm* (the All-knowing), and *al-‘ādil* (the Just).

⁹⁷ *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. I.1–I.10; III.1–III.28; IV.1–IV.4; VI.1–VI.19.

In the Norman written sources, the royal textile workshop is never referred to as a *ṭirāz*, the Arabic term for a state-controlled workshop in which inscribed textiles were produced. This is particularly relevant for our later discussion of the political function of Arabic textile inscriptions and the appropriation of this type of ornament in Sicily. Instead, the workshop appears under two – possibly three – different denominations:⁹⁸ *al-khizāna al-malakiya* on the mantle and alb, *nobiles officinae* and *regio ergasterio*. *Khizāna* and *ergasterio* are terms used in the textile inscriptions themselves, whereas *nobiles officinae* is the name which the anonymous twelfth-century historian writing under the name of Hugo Falcandus employs to refer to the royal textile workshop.⁹⁹ The terms can be related, respectively, to the Arabic, Latin and Greek traditions of Norman Sicily and their use has sparked lively debate about their significance in the search for the origins of the textile arts of Norman Sicily. In particular, the argument revolves around the question whether silk weaving in the Norman workshop was imported from Byzantium, and if the Arabic craftsmen of the Norman workshop were purely embroiderers working in Islamic tradition.¹⁰⁰

A comparably large group of textile fragments has been attributed to the Norman court workshop because of their resemblance to the type of figured textile found among the Norman funerary garments and as part of the lining of Roger II's mantle from the Vienna group (Fig. 23).¹⁰¹ A particular technical characteristic of these fabrics is that they are interwoven with *Häutchengold*, a gold thread wound around a leather core.¹⁰² As shown above, a very similar fabric was also part of the hem of Roger II's funerary mantle illustrated in Daniele. Individual motifs in the complex ornamental patterns of this group have been traced to sources as disparate as Sassanian Persia,

⁹⁸ Three, if the 'ergasterio-fragment' from the Kestner-Museum is included. Its Sicilian origin is not entirely confirmed. Rosalia VAROLI PIAZZA, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. IV.1.

⁹⁹ Hugo Falcandus, *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily* by 'Hugo Falcandus' 1154–1169, trans. by Graham LOUD and Thomas WIEDEMANN (Manchester Medieval Sources), Manchester 1998, p. 259.

¹⁰⁰ MONNERET DE VILLARD (1946).

¹⁰¹ *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. III.1–17; CARATSCH (2004), pp. 125–35; Cilgia CARATSCH, *Der Futterstoff des Königsmantels Rogers II. von Sizilien*, Magister thesis, University of Vienna 2001. See also Hanna KRONBERGER-FRENTZEN, *Ein Goldstoff des Lyoner Textilmuseums und seine Beziehung zu den Wirkborten des deutschen Kaisermantels*, in: *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 12 (1938), pp. 35–42; Theodor WIESCHEBRINK, *Mittelalterliches Flechtgewebe aus Palermo*, in: *Westfalen: Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde* 22 (1937), pp. 79–85; Albert F. KENDRICK, *Catalogue of Muhammadan Textiles of the Medieval Period* (Victoria and Albert Museum. Department of Textiles), London 1924, pp. 48–49; Ernst KUMSCH, *Mittelalterliche Flechtgewebe*, in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 38 (1903), pp. 308–19.

¹⁰² JÁRÓ, Márta, *Goldfäden in den sizilischen (nachmaligen) Krönungsgewändern der Könige und Kaiser des Heiligen Römischen Reiches und im sogenannten Häubchen König Stephans von Ungarn: Ergebnisse wissenschaftlicher Untersuchungen*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), pp. 311–18.



Fig. 23: Gold-woven lining of Roger II's mantle, detail, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. n. XIII 14.

Byzantium, Romanesque manuscript painting and Coptic Egypt.¹⁰³ The style of these textiles thus resists classification into the commonly used categories of 'Byzantine', 'Islamic', and 'Latin' Mediterranean. What remains to be determined is the degree to which this indebtedness to various visual traditions might be a common feature of Norman textiles, whether we could consider it characteristic of a 'Norman style', and, not least, to what extent such a 'Norman style' – if there is one – depended upon the origins of the artisans employed in the royal textile workshops.

Textiles firmly associated with the Norman court also include those from the cathedral treasury of Cefalù.¹⁰⁴ These garments, which allegedly belonged to Roger II,

¹⁰³ CARATSCH (2001), p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ They are now preserved in two different collections, the treasury in Cefalù Cathedral and the *Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Applicata* of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan. Entries by Crispino VALENZIANO, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. III 18, A–C (Cefalù); and Irene TOMEDI, in *ibid.*, cat. III 19 A–C (Milan).



Fig. 24: Fragment of a dalmatic from the cathedral treasury of Cefalù, Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Applicata ed Incisioni, Castello Sforzesco, Milan, Inv. n. 2127T.

including a stole, dalmatic and tunic, were sent to Cefalù after Roger's death (Fig. 24). They appear to have been actively venerated and, as a result, were gradually destroyed over the centuries; the few remaining fragments are greatly worn. The fragment of the stole consists of a silken ground fabric interwoven with gilt silver thread. The dalmatic was also silken with a fabric in irregular satin weave; the tunic must have originally consisted of striped silk brocade. It is likely that these fabrics were produced at the Norman court: the evidence provided in Hugo Falcandus' description of the royal workshop suggests that textiles of these types were woven there during William II's reign at the latest (a full transcription and translation of the passage can be found in the appendix). Textile types mentioned include *amita*, *dimita*, *trimita*, *exhimita*, *diarhodon*, *diapisti* and *exantemata* (or *exarentasmata*).¹⁰⁵ Falcandus also explicitly mentions the use of gold in the workshops.¹⁰⁶ Unlike the ceremonial garments kept in Vienna, however, none of the remaining parts of Roger II's garments from Cefalù bear any trace of Arabic inscriptions or embroidery.

¹⁰⁵ The textile terminology used in the *Epistle* is explained in Camillo GALLO, Guagliardo PALERMITANO, *Il setificio in Sicilia. Saggio storico-politico di Camillo Gallo, e Guagliardo Palermitano*, in: *Nuova raccolta di opuscoli di autori siciliani, Tomo primo alla grandezza di Vincenzo Ignazio Paterno-Castello Principe di Biscari, Palermo 1788*, pp. 180–83. *Amita*, *dimita*, *trimita*: 'drappi lavorati ad uno, due, tre licci facili a tessersi, e di non molto valore.' *Exhimita*: 'dagli Italiani era un drappo lavorato a sei licci di valore alquanto maggiore dei primi tre.' *Diarhodon*: 'drappo di color di rosa, o scarlato splendissimo.' *Diapisti*: 'drappo di seta di color verde molto vago a guardarsi.' *Exantemata*: 'drappi fiorati intessuti con oro.' *Exarentasmata*: 'drappo intessuto con seta e oro e sparso di alcuni scudetti e bolle rotonde.'

¹⁰⁶ 'Multa quidem et alia videas ibi varii coloris ac diversi generis ornamenta in quibus et sericis aurum intexitur.' Hugo Falcandus, *La historia o Liber de Regno Sicilie e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitanum Ecclesie Thesaurarium di Ugo Falcando*, ed. by Giovanni B. SIRAGUSA, Rome 1897, pp. 178–80.



Fig. 25: Fragment of a silk-brocade, 12th-c. Sicily (?), Kestner Museum Hannover, Inv. n. 3875.

The great variety of the textiles associated with the Norman court – I present here only a minute selection – underlines the difficulties involved in attempting to identify a Norman textile ‘group’ (aside from the funerary textiles already discussed and the garments in Vienna) to contextualise the royal garments. This may be one reason why there is yet to be a comprehensive, monographic study of the preserved Norman royal garments in the context of Sicilian textile production. In the present study, however, which focuses on their function within the Norman context in which they were used, and on the methodological frames through which the textiles can be approached, the question of the origins of the textiles and of their ornamental motifs is marginal. What is more relevant instead is to determine the Norman royal garments’ possible indebtedness to an Arabic tradition.

An important piece which might be used as evidence against the indebtedness of Norman Sicilian textile production to the Arabic tradition, for example, is an inscribed silk kept in the Kestner Museum in Hannover, which is regularly associated with the Norman court of Sicily (Fig. 25).¹⁰⁷ This relatively large piece (23.5 × 38–38.5 cm)

¹⁰⁷ Rosalia VAROLI PIAZZA, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. IV.1; Ruth GRÖNWOLDT, *Webereien und Stickereien des Mittelalters* (Bildkataloge des Kestner Museums Hannover 7), Hannover 1964, cat. 31; Ugo MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Il frammento di Hannover e la tessitura palermitana di stile bizantino*, in: *Rivista dell'Istituto nazionale d'archeologia e storia dell'arte*, ser. NS 2 (1953), pp. 162–69.



Fig. 26: Mantle of Philipp of Swabia, 12th–13th-c. Sicily (?), Historisches Museum der Pfalz, Speyer.

shows slightly more than half of a medallion on a blue-purple ground, which features two animals, possibly lions. The medallion is surrounded by an inscribed band framed by pearl shapes and with tight Latin capitals. A peacock or similar bird can be seen on the outside of the medallion. The inscription framing the medallion's central figures is incomplete. It reads: *OPERATVM IN REGIO ERGAST[ERIO]*. It was the use of this term to refer to this textile's place of production – the Greek *ergasterion* – which sparked controversy about the indebtedness of Norman textiles to Byzantine silk weaving. The main argument, expressed, for example, by Ugo Monneret de Villard, was that silk weaving was a skill introduced to the Norman workshop by Byzantine silk workers.¹⁰⁸ In fact, Jewish weavers were abducted from Thebes in 1147 so that they could introduce novel techniques and styles to the Norman royal workshop.¹⁰⁹ The above-mentioned letter of Hugo Falcandus, which quotes a large number of textile varieties using their Greek names, indeed suggests that many of the textiles woven at the Norman court were indebted to Byzantine techniques.¹¹⁰ However, stylistically, the Kestner Museum piece appears unrelated to any of the groups of garments and

108 Rosalia VAROLI PIAZZA, *La Produzione di manufatti tessili nel palazzo reale di Palermo: 'tiraz' o 'ergasterion'*, in: Mario D'ONOFRIO (ed.), *I Normanni popolo d'Europa 1030–1200* (Rome, Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, 1994), Venice 1994, pp. 288–90. See also MONNERET DE VILLARD (1946), pp. 429–89.

109 *'Maxima praeda direpta Opifices etiam, qui sericos pannos texere solent, ob ignominiam Imperatoris illius, suisque Principis gloriam captivos deducunt: quos Rogerius in Palermo Siciliae Metropoli collocans artem illa texendi suos edocere praecepit. Et exhinc praedicta ars illa prius a Graecis tantum inter Christianos habita Romanis coepit patere ingeniis.'* Quotation from Bishop Otto Frisingensis (*De gestis Friderici*, lib. 1 cap. 33). See VAROLI PIAZZA (1994), p. 288; GALLO/PALERMITANO (1788), p. 171.

110 SIRAGUSA (1897), pp. 178–80. Full quotation of the passage in the appendix.



Fig. 27: Embroidered medallion on Philipp of Swabia's mantle and embroidered breast-panel from the underlayers of the alb.

associated textiles we have discussed. It is difficult, therefore, to ascertain its alleged Sicilian origin and use this piece as firm evidence in the debate.

The mantle from the sepulchre of Philip II of Swabia (1177–1208) in Speyer Cathedral¹¹¹ is another piece which has recently been assigned a Norman Sicilian provenance for technical and stylistic reasons (Fig. 26).¹¹² The garment is badly damaged. What remains are sections of the ground fabric, two embroidered medallions – positioned at the front in the proposed reconstruction – and parts of a tablet-woven hem. The medallions show the heads of Christ and the Virgin surrounded by a frame with a frieze of trefoil ornament in stylised heart shapes. While no comparable embroidery with figures is known from Norman Sicily, the motifs in the medallions' ornamental frame are very similar to those on the breast-panel discovered in the underlayers of the Norman alb (Fig. 27). If we argue in favour of a Norman provenance of Philipp II's mantle, the Latin Christian iconography of its embroidered scenes – and indeed the technical affinity to Byzantine embroideries – would add complexity to the com-

¹¹¹ Eighteen royal and imperial tombs from Speyer Cathedral were opened in 1900 and textile finds extracted. The results of their recent conservation are documented in Melanie HERGET, *Des Kaisers letzte Kleider: Neue Forschungen zu den organischen Funden aus den Herrschergräbern im Dom zu Speyer*, Munich 2011.

¹¹² Giusy LALLI, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. II.3 (listed with the 'Byzantine' textiles); VON WILCKENS (1995), p. 279. Von Wilckens mentions the particular technique typical of Byzantine embroidery, but also reminiscent of works from Sicily and Cyprus.

monly voiced argument that embroidery in Norman Sicily was created by Arab artisans working in the Islamic tradition. In fact, matters seem far more entangled.

Although the Byzantines, who ruled over Sicily and southern Italy before the Arab and Norman conquests, were famous for sericulture and weaving, until the twelfth century all types of silk and silk textiles that were produced on the island bore Arabic names. It is in fact very likely that sericulture was introduced to Sicily by the Arabs.¹¹³ This would probably have involved the movement of Ifriqiyan craftsmen to Sicily,¹¹⁴ who had the knowledge needed to establish a shared silk-producing tradition between these neighbouring Mediterranean shores.¹¹⁵ While a local silk weaving practice would thus have been established in Sicily prior to the conquest by the Normans, weavers from Byzantium were active in the royal workshop at the latest from 1147 onwards. There is also ample evidence for the activity of Arab craftsmen in the Norman court workshop. Apart from the fact that the Norman garments bear Arabic inscriptions, there are also written sources which suggest that craftsmen versed in the Arabic language were employed in the court workshop: several Arab craftsmen involved in the production of the Norman alb, for example, are known by their names, through the discovery of handwritten notes in the cuffs and arm-band. And, according to Ibn Jubayr, a certain Yaḥyā was employed as an embroiderer at William II's court.¹¹⁶

While the evidence of the embroidered inscriptions on the Norman mantle and alb suggests that Arabic craftsmen would certainly have embroidered in the Norman court workshop, a strict division between traditions, techniques and motifs – as suggested in the scholarly literature – does not seem tenable. The Arabic inscriptions on the stockings are not embroidered, but woven. The handwritten notes also mention a certain *Damiyan* and a *Ṭūmas*, who can be identified with some certainty as Christians – possibly eunuchs, Arab converts at the Norman court – whereas *ʿAlī of Maḷṭa*

113 David JACOBY, *Silk and Silk-Textiles in Arab and Norman Sicily. The Economic Context*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), p. 383.

114 On silk production in the Maghreb and Ifriqiya, see Robert B. SERJEANT, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*, Beirut 1972, pp. 177–90.

115 It is difficult to document the presence of craftsmen of Ifriqiyan origin in Sicily. However, the census lists for western Sicily of 1178 and 1183 may be tentatively mentioned as possible evidence. These record that half of the individuals named *ḥariri* (probably silk workers) were assigned the status of 'smooth men' (*muls*), which may imply that they were immigrants. I owe this information to Alex Metcalfe. While it cannot be excluded that they simply came from another area in Sicily, they may also have originated further away. As Metcalfe has shown from the analysis of last names in the document from 1183, many of them seem to have come from Ifriqiya: METCALFE (2009), p. 269. On *muls*, see also JOHNS (2002), pp. 147–51.

116 *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*: being the chronicle of a medieval Spanish Moor concerning his journey to the Egypt of Saladin, the holy cities of Arabia, Baghdad the city of the caliphs, the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, and the Norman kingdom of Sicily, trans. by Ronald J. C. BROADHURST, London 1952, New Delhi 2003, p. 341. SERJEANT (1972), p. 192.

would probably have been a Muslim,¹¹⁷ so Christians and Muslims appear to have been working together. Moreover, there is evidence of Arabic silk weaving activity in pre-Norman Sicily, which will be discussed in more detail with reference to the question of Roger II's mantle in Chapter 4. And finally, the Byzantine–Jewish weavers from Thebes were reportedly abducted to pass on their knowledge to the Sicilian locals so that an exchange would have taken place at the latest when the artisans were working side by side in medieval Palermo.

2 Inscribed Textiles and Arabic Inscriptions in European Medieval Arts

In contrast to Norman Sicily – and indeed to the Islamic courts of the medieval Mediterranean – the use of ornamental inscriptions on textiles associated with the ruling elite can be observed only rarely in the courts of medieval Latin Europe. Although many of the once-extant ceremonial garments are now lost,¹¹⁸ the remaining material sources suggest that textile inscriptions – unrelated to the iconography of the textiles – were not widely used.

2.1 Textile Inscriptions in Latin Court Culture – ‘The Star Mantle’

One famous exception is the so-called ‘star mantle’ (*Sternenmantel*) of Emperor Henry II (973/8–1024), which is presently kept in Bamberg (Fig. 28).¹¹⁹ The star mantle is cut into the same semicircular shape as the mantle of Roger II and the so-called ‘*chape de Charlemagne*’ from Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily – a shape based on

¹¹⁷ JOHNS (2006), p. 331.

¹¹⁸ An idea of the sheer quantity of textiles originally kept in medieval treasuries, of which only a small percentage has survived, can be gleaned from treasury inventories. See for instance Bernhard BISCHOFF, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse: Von der Zeit Karls des Großen bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1967.

¹¹⁹ Horst ENZENSBERGER, Bamberg und Apulien, in: Christine VAN EICKELS and Klaus VAN EICKELS (eds), *Das Bistum Bamberg in der Welt des Mittelalters (Bamberger interdisziplinäre Mittelalterstudien. Vorträge und Vorlesungen 1)*, Bamberg 2007, pp. 141–50; Renate BAUMGÄRTEL-FLEISCHMANN, Der Sternenmantel Kaiser Heinrichs II. und seine Inschriften, in: Walter KOCH (ed.), *Epigraphik 1988. Referate und Round-table-Gespräche (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse, Denkschriften 213; Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Herausgabe der Inschriften des Deutschen Mittelalters 2)*, Vienna 1990, pp. 105–25; Elisabeth O’CONNOR, The Star Mantle of Henry II, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University 1980. On the inscriptions, see also Ernst MAASS, Inschriften und Bilder des Mantels Kaiser Heinrichs II., in: *Zeitschrift für christliche Kunst* 12/11 (1899), pp. 322–42; and id., Inschriften und Bilder des Mantels Kaiser Heinrichs II., in: *Zeitschrift für christliche Kunst* 12/12 (1900), pp. 361–76.



Fig. 28: 'Star Mantle' of Henry II, 11th c., Diözesanmuseum Bamberg.

the Latin liturgical tradition.¹²⁰ The star mantle's embroidery is dated to the first quarter of the eleventh century, but its ground fabric was replaced by a dark blue Italian damask fabric in the fifteenth century, so that the mantle's original layout can no longer be reconstructed with certainty.¹²¹ The iconography consists of historiated star shapes with Biblical and astrological imagery, accompanied by inscriptions. The various inscribed *tituli* identifying the iconography of the stars are often found on Latin fabrics and on Byzantine textiles.¹²² However, the star mantle also bears a long inscription in Latin capitals embroidered along its hem, as well as two smaller inscriptions which are different from the explanatory *tituli*.¹²³

¹²⁰ The '*chape de Charlemagne*', kept in the cathedral treasury of Metz, is attributed to the court workshops of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Although it is, of course, an important comparative piece for the earlier Norman garments, it will not be considered in this study since it is not inscribed. Gilles SOUBIGOU, La '*Chape de Charlemagne*' de la Cathédrale de Metz: Étude historiographique, in: Irmgard SIEDE, Annemarie STAUFER and Elke MICHLER (eds), *Textile Kostbarkeiten Staufischer Herrscher. Werkstätten – Bilder – Funktionen*, Petersberg 2014, pp. 36–43; and Elke MICHLER, *Neue Forschungen zur sogenannten Chape de Charlemagne: Bestand, Veränderungen, Schadensbilder und Konservierung*, in *ibid.*, pp. 44–59; HAUSSEHERR/VÄTERLEIN (1977), cat. 775.

¹²¹ Luitgar GÖLLER (ed.), *1000 Jahre Bistum Bamberg 1007–2007: Unterm Sternenmantel* (Bamberg Diözesanmuseum, Historisches Museum und Staatsbibliothek, 2007), Petersberg 2007, cat. 11, p. 409.

¹²² Various examples in Anna MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Silk in Byzantium*, London 2004.

¹²³ The *tituli* seem to have been changed when the mantle was restored between 1453 and 1455. The original programme of the mantle, of which only the inscription accompanying the Zodiac of Cancer remains unaltered, seems to have been of an astrological nature. Renate BAUMGÄRTEL-FLEISCHMANN,

The first of these, the inscription running parallel to the largest one on the hem, is embroidered in simple Latin capitals. It explains the mantle's iconography as being a 'description of the whole world' ('*descriptio tocius orbis*') and names the patron who commissioned the mantle – Ismahel ('*Melus*') of Bari, an Apulian prince who came to the emperor in order to seek support against the Byzantines. He did not live to see the mantle completed, however.¹²⁴ The second inscription, also unrelated to the *tituli*, is visible on the mantle's central axis. It confirms that the emperor donated the mantle to the Church.¹²⁵ Both of these smaller inscriptions provide factual information about the mantle and seem to have been added at different stages of the mantle's early history to document its pedigree.

The largest and most elaborate inscription, which runs along the mantle's hem, reads as a dedicatory formula to the emperor:¹²⁶

*O DECUS EUROPAE CESAR HEINRICE BEARE [beate] ANGEAT [augeat] IMPREIUM [imperium]
IBTI [tibi] REX QUI RENA WNE [regnat in evum].*

There is some controversy as to whether the mantle was made by southern Italian embroiderers and brought to Bamberg, or whether it was commissioned later.¹²⁷ In the former case, the mantle could provide unique evidence for the production of high-quality embroidery in southern Italy a century before the Norman mantle was produced. However, the style of this inscription has been convincingly related to manuscript illumination from Regensburg,¹²⁸ so that a northern production of the mantle would seem more likely. It is conceivable, nevertheless, that Ismahel of Bari commissioned the precise wording of the inscription and that he might have chosen the mantle's iconography.

Although Roger II's mantle and the star mantle differ, not only formally, but also in terms of the circumstances of their production – as far as these can be traced – some parallels can be observed. The use of inscriptions as an ornament independent

Die Kaisermäntel im Bamberger Domschatz, in: Josef KIRMEIER et al. (eds), *Kaiser Heinrich II. 1002–1024* (Bamberg, Bayerische Landesausstellung, 2002), Augsburg 2002, p. 383.

124 The inscription reads: '+ *DESCRIPCIO TOCIUS ORBIS + PAX ISMAHELI QUI HOC ORDINAVIT*.' The phrase '*pax Ismaheli*' suggests that the patron died before the completion of the work. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

125 '*SUP (ER) NE VSYE SIT GRATU(M) HOC CESARIS DONUM*' ('*vsye*' is a Latin corruption of the Greek word meaning 'a being'). Sigmund Freiherr von PÖLNITZ, *Die Bamberger Kaisermäntel*, Weissenhorn 1973, p. 33.

126 Transcription based on *ibid.*, p. 32. 'O adornment of Europe, Emperor Henry, blissful, may the King who reigns in eternity augment for you the Empire.'

127 Pölnitz expresses little doubt that the mantle was commissioned in southern Italy by Ismahel as a coronation present for Henry II. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

128 BAUMGÄRTEL-FLEISCHMANN (2002), cat. 203, pp. 382–83.

of any iconographic associations, for example, is a peculiarity within the Latin court context, which the mantles share. Moreover, the conception of the inscription lining the hem of the star mantle in metered speech,¹²⁹ and the ensuing emphasis on sound as one aesthetic dimension of the inscription, creates an interesting parallel with the rhyming Kufic inscription on Roger II's mantle. In addition, the cosmological connotation, already suggested for the mantle of Roger II, is particularly tangible in the case of Henry II's mantle, which is studded with celestial motifs.¹³⁰ Imbuing a ruler's mantle with celestial connotations is a common *topos* traceable to the Biblical and Classical traditions.¹³¹

It is in fact impossible, in the absence of further comparative examples, to make a case for the uniqueness of the parallels above. It would be risky to look for specific relations between these two royal mantles in the absence of further evidence and merely on the basis of the accident of their survival; the question whether the parallels between the two mantles might be due to a common southern Italian background thus ought to remain unsolved. They are compared here as rare examples of a medieval vocabulary of royal display in the Latin sphere, allowing for a better contextualisation of the material sources of this study in the frame of Latin court culture. The scarcity of additional examples of Latin royal garments, and especially those with inscriptions, underlines the exceptional status of the group of Norman garments.

2.2 Textiles with Arabic Inscriptions in European Church Treasuries

While the Norman textiles with Arabic inscriptions occupy a special status in the context of Latin Europe as they were directly produced for Latin kings, imported silk textiles featuring Arabic were popular in medieval Latin Europe and left their mark in other media, such as in manuscript illumination and painting.¹³² In fact, the textile

¹²⁹ The end of the mantle's inscription is heavily abbreviated. However, Franz Bock's suggestion that it should be completed to read as two hexameters finds general acceptance. See *ibid.*

¹³⁰ On cosmic connotations of mantles, see Robert EISLER, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt*, Munich 1910.

¹³¹ Biblical references to stellar mantles include a description of Aaron wearing a mantle depicting the Earth. MUTHESIUS (2004), p. 30.

¹³² Vera-Simone Schulz has recently published several articles on the use of Kufic script in Italian panel painting; see, for example, Vera-Simone SCHULZ, *From Letter to Line: Artistic Experiments with Pseudo-Script in Late Medieval Italian Painting*, in: Marzia FAIETTI and Gerhard WOLF (eds), *The Power of Line*, Munich 2015, pp. 144–61. See also Maria-Vittoria FONTANA, *The Pseudo-Epigraphic Arabic Characters*, in: Marco CIATTI and Max SEIDEL (eds), *Giotto: The Santa Maria Novella Crucifix*, Florence 2002, pp. 217–25; Hidemichi TANAKA, *Oriental Scripts in the Paintings of Giotto's Period*, in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 113 (1989), pp. 214–26; Alessandra BAGNERA, *Tessuti islamici nella pittura medievale toscana*, in: *Islam: Storia e civiltà* 7 (1988), pp. 251–66; Sylvia AULD, *Kuficising Inscriptions in the Work of Gentile da Fabriano*, in: *Oriental Art* 32 (1986), pp. 245–65; Gustave SOULIER, *Les*

medium has been accorded a particularly important role in the transmission of forms in the medieval Mediterranean and beyond. Lisa Golombek's *The Draped Universe of Islam* (1988) and Eva Hoffman's *Pathways of Portability* (2001),¹³³ for example, make a strong case for considering the circulation of textiles as one of the major agents through which 'Islamic' forms such as Arabic inscriptions were imported to medieval Europe.¹³⁴ Any attempt to situate the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions and their distinctiveness in the frame of Latin visual culture thus also requires a comparison with imported Arabic-inscribed textiles in medieval Europe.

The remaining material evidence consists of numerous fragments scattered throughout museum collections, libraries and church treasuries (therefore not systematically published) which were used for the lining of books, caskets and reliquaries, or as relic covers. Their original function is mostly unknown. Only very few large textiles were preserved. These include, for example, the so-called '*suaire de Sainte Anne*' and '*suaire de Cadouin*' (Fig. 29). Both are Fatimid textiles from the eleventh century, possibly made as honorary garments (*khil'a*).¹³⁵ They may have been brought to France as booty and are now kept in French church treasuries with a fictitious identity as the shrouds of Christian saints. The Arabic script on the textiles, their relation

caractères coufiques dans la peinture toscane, in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 5/9 (1924), pp. 347–58. A functional analysis of textile pages with pseudo-Kufic inscriptions in manuscript illumination can be found in Anna BÜCHELER, *Veil and Shroud: Eastern References and Allegoric Functions in the Textile Imagery of a Twelfth-century Gospel Book from Braunschweig*, in: Vera BEYER, Isabelle DOLEZALEK, Monica JUNEJA (eds), *Contextualising Choices: Islamicate Elements in European Arts*, *Medieval History Journal* 15/2 (2012), pp. 269–97.

133 HOFFMAN (2001); Lisa GOLOMBEK, *The Draped Universe of Islam*, in: Priscilla P. SOUCEK (ed.), *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World* (Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen, Institute of Fine Arts New York University, 2–4 April 1980), University Park 1988, pp. 25–50.

134 See also Jacqueline LECLERCQ-MARX, *L'imitation des tissus 'orientaux' dans l'art du Haut Moyen Age et de l'époque romane: Témoignages et problématiques*, in: Arturo C. QUINTAVALLE (ed.), *Medioevo mediterraneo: L'Occidente, Bisanzio e l'Islam*, Milan 2007, pp. 456–69. On the exchange of motifs and ornamental patterns between textiles and other media, see Louise W. MACKIE, *Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations*, *Muqarnas* 2 (1984), pp. 143–44. Economic factors underlying the circulation of silk in the medieval Mediterranean have been addressed in David JACOBY, *Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004), pp. 197–240.

135 Brigitte DELLUC, Gilles DELLUC, *Le suaire de Cadouin et son frère: Le voile de Sainte Anne d'Apt (Vaucluse): Deux pièces exceptionnelles d'archéologie textile*, in: *Bulletin de la Société Historique et Archéologique du Périgord* 128 (2001), pp. 607–27. Georgette CORNU, *Les tissus d'apparat fatimides, parmi les plus somptueux le 'voile de Sainte Anne' d'Apt*, in: Marianne BARRUCAND (ed.), *L'Égypte fatimide, son art et son histoire* (Actes du colloque organisé à Paris les 28, 29 et 30 mai 1998), Paris 1999, pp. 331–37.



Fig. 29: Fatimid textile, 11th c., detail, Musée de l'Abbaye de Cadouin.

to the Fatimid court – and ultimately also their Islamic origin – seem to have been deemed unimportant and were eclipsed in favour of the textiles' later association with Christian saints. The so-called chasuble of Thomas Becket from Fermo Cathedral in Italy (Fig. 30) provides a further example of the 'Christianisation' of a fabric of Islamic origin. The Arabic inscription on the chasuble allows a firm attribution of parts of the fabric to a workshop from Islamic Spain.¹³⁶ The textile of Islamic provenance has undergone a process of Christian appropriation¹³⁷ by being fashioned into a Christian liturgical garment, but also through its association with Thomas Becket, whose cult as a saint spread rapidly all over Europe in the thirteenth century.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ A monograph with various contributions on the chasuble is currently being edited by Avinoam Shalem. See also Annabelle SIMON-CAHN, *The Fermo Chasuble of St. Thomas Becket and Hispano-Mauresque Cosmological Silks: Some Speculations on the Adaptive Reuse of Textiles*, in: *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), pp. 1–5; Antonino SANTANGELO, *Il restauro della casula di Fermo*, in: *Bollettino d'Arte* 3 (1960), pp. 273–77; David Storm RICE, *The Fermo Chasuble of St. Thomas-a-Becket Revealed as the Earliest Fully Dated and Localised Major Islamic Embroidery Known*, in: *The Illustrated London News* (3rd October 1959), pp. 356–58.

¹³⁷ The 'Salzburg chasuble' provides a further example for the refashioning of an Islamic fabric into a Latin liturgical vestment. Gertrude TOWNSEND, *A Twelfth-Century Chasuble*, in: *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 33 (1935), pp. 5–16. The transformations of Islamic objects into objects used in Christian liturgical contexts is addressed in Avinoam SHALEM, *Islamische Objekte in Kirchenschätzen der lateinischen Christenheit: Ästhetische Stufen des Umgangs mit dem Anderen und dem Hybriden*, in: Christine VAN EICKELS and Klaus VAN EICKELS (eds), *Das Bistum Bamberg in der Welt des Mittelalters*, Bamberg 2007, pp. 163–75. See also SHALEM (1996).

¹³⁸ Anne J. DUGGAN, *The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Thirteenth Century*, in: Meryl JANCEY (ed.), *St Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford: Essays in His Honour*, Hereford (1982), pp. 21–44.



Fig. 30: Chasuble of Fermo, early 12th c., Spanish (?), Fermo Cathedral.

These textiles consist exclusively of pieces which were used in the Latin religious sphere. Their Arabic inscriptions obviously did not prevent their use in Christian contexts, but of course we have no evidence whether they were recognised and read as Arabic inscriptions. Moreover, the accident of their survival should not lead to any general conclusions about the reception of Islamic textiles in medieval Europe. In fact, it seems that the same type of textiles was used also at court, as can be seen from the precious few surviving examples of Arabic-inscribed textiles found in royal burials. They include, for example, the precious woven silk textiles from the royal sepulchres in the Monastery of Las Huelgas in Castille,¹³⁹ and Rudolph IV's (d. 1365) Ilkhanid shroud with an Arabic inscription.¹⁴⁰ The Arabic inscriptions were openly placed in prominent positions on this shroud, in contrast to the chasuble of Fermo, where the Arabic inscriptions were discovered only recently during restoration works. On other textiles, the inscriptions are so small that they are almost invisible, or so stylised that they could be confused with a linear ornament, as is the case with the *pelota* of Eleanor of Castile (Fig. 31), found among the funerary garments of Las Huelgas. The Arabic itself, however, and its possible associations with political enemies and religious antagonists, does not seem to have been an obstacle to its use in Europe.

¹³⁹ María-Judith FELICIANO, *Muslim Shrouds for Christian Kings? A Reassessment of Andalusí Textiles in Thirteenth-Century Castilian Life and Ritual*, in: Cynthia ROBINSON and Leyla ROUHI, *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, Leiden 2005, pp. 101–31.

¹⁴⁰ RITTER (2016).



Fig. 31: *Pelota* of Eleanor of Castile, c. 1244, Monastery of Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas, Burgos.

Imported silk textiles were a desirable commodity, clearly used to convey the high social status of their wearers.

This selective overview of textiles with Arabic inscriptions used in medieval Latin Europe emphasises the uniqueness of the Norman garments in the frame of Latin court culture. Whereas all these textiles were imported from the Islamic sphere, the Arabic inscriptions on the Norman garments bear witness to movements of cultural interchange at the very level of the Norman textiles' production. The evidence of the use in Christian contexts of both imported textiles and the Norman garments with Arabic inscriptions further suggests that there was no obligatory association of Arabic inscriptions with Islam. On the contrary, there appears to have been a much greater flexibility in the use and circulation of these textiles than modern art historical categorisations of artefacts as 'Islamic' and 'Christian' would suggest. A closer look at the historical receptions of the Norman royal garments and at various attempts at interpreting their Arabic inscriptions, from the eighteenth century to the modern day, will review some of the assumptions underlying the perception of Arabic script in Latinate contexts as foreign and boundary-transgressing ornament.

3 Historical Receptions of the Ceremonial Garments from Norman Sicily

An eighteenth-century illustration by Johann-Adam Delsenbach of the Sicilian ceremonial garments in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna shows how they could be worn in superimposed layers (Fig. 32).¹⁴¹ Above the shoes, usually attributed to the reign of Frederick II,¹⁴² the embroidered hem of the Norman tunic is only just discernible, hidden primarily by the Norman alb, worn above and tied with a cingulum. Draped around the neck of the Emperor Sigismund (r. 1410–1437) is a stole.¹⁴³ He wears a crown, the *Reichskrone*,¹⁴⁴ and carries the orb and sceptre in his hands, which are covered by gloves, also attributed to Sicilian manufacture from the time of Frederick II.¹⁴⁵ Roger II's mantle is represented in some detail, with the beginning of its Arabic inscription visible on the lower left.

When the Norman garments, which served as the coronation garments of the Holy Roman Empire until its dissolution in 1806, were first used in this or a similar combination remains a matter for speculation. The most commonly encountered assumption, that they were first used as a complete set for the second coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor and Sicilian King Frederick II, in Rome on 22 November 1220, cannot be verified.¹⁴⁶ However, as we shall see, some of the garments, such as the stockings and alb, indeed appear to have been reworked in Frederick II's court workshops, possibly to be fitted for his use, while the gloves and shoes are usually dated entirely to the period of Frederick II's reign.¹⁴⁷ We can assume, consequently, that the garments entered the treasury of the Holy Roman Emperors through the Hohenstaufen dynasty.

¹⁴¹ DELSENBACH, Johann-Adam, *Délinéation exacte des ornemens impériaux du Saint Empire Romain et Allemand, gardés dans la ville libre et impériale de Nuremberg*, Dessinés et gravés au dépens de feu Monsieur le Sénateur Jérôme Guillaume Ebner D'Eschenbach. Par Jean Adam Delsenbach. Avec les Saintes reliques gravées d'après les dessins de Frédéric Juvenel, Nuremberg 1790.

¹⁴² BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 71.

¹⁴³ The stole is of later manufacture, but was probably made before 1328 in Italy. See BAUER, in: *ibid.*, cat. 74.

¹⁴⁴ The imperial crown is kept with the textile regalia in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. See FILLITZ (1954).

¹⁴⁵ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 72.

¹⁴⁶ BAUER (1994), p. 284; FILLITZ (1955), p. 123.

¹⁴⁷ This is based on stylistic considerations and the comparison of certainly dateable textiles with what is perceived on stylistic grounds to be 'later' additions. Conf. Chapter 5.5.



Fig. 32: Emperor Sigismund in full regalia, illustration from Delsenbach (1790).

3.1 Tracing Textile Biographies in the Holy Roman Empire

Nothing was known about the specific circumstances of the use of the Norman royal garments and their whereabouts until 1246, when garments fitting their description appear in the inventory of Castle Trifels in the Palatinate:¹⁴⁸

‘[...] The imperial mantle with precious stones [...] an alb of white samite, adorned with precious stones, a robe of samite, two scarlet trousers and two gilded shoes adorned with stones.’

Their subsequent movements are relatively well documented.¹⁴⁹ On 16 October 1273, the imperial insignia were handed over to Rudolph of Habsburg and taken to Kyburg Castle near Winterthur. The regalia were then moved back and forth until Pentecost 1315, when they were put on public display in Basel to mark the coronation of Isa-

¹⁴⁸ ‘[...]den keyserlichen Mantel mit edelen Steynen, [...] eyn Albe von wissem Samite mit edelen Steynen gezieret, eynen Rochk von Samitte, zwo scharlakens Hosen, und zwene verguldene Schuhe, mit Steynen gezieret.’ See the documentary appendix in *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), p. 325.

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed account of the locations and keepers of the imperial regalia, see FILLITZ (1954), and more recently BAUER (2004a); and BAUER (1994).

bella of Aragon, wife of the Habsburgian Duke Frederick I of Austria, who aspired to German kingship. After losing the battle of Mühldorf in 1322, the Habsburgs were forced to entrust the regalia to Louis of Bavaria, who kept them in Munich. They then entered the possession of Emperor Charles IV (r. 1346–1378), who brought them to Prague with much fanfare. An inventory with a complete list of the – by then – imperial garments was drawn up in 1350 (it mentions a few more recent additions too).¹⁵⁰ For the remainder of the fourteenth century and the first quarter of the fifteenth century the Norman garments remained in Bohemia.

An important change then took place: an imperial privilege issued by Emperor Sigismund on 29 September 1423 entrusted the regalia to the free imperial city of Nuremberg. From Nuremberg, the regalia, which had progressively acquired the status of relics, were taken to the imperial coronations at Frankfurt. This state of affairs lasted until 1796, when they were moved again to avoid being looted by the French troops. After passing through Regensburg and Passau, the Norman garments, together with the other objects from the treasury, finally arrived in Vienna on 29 October 1800. This is where they have been kept ever since, with the brief exception of the period from 1938 until 1946, when they were brought back to Nuremberg during the Third Reich.¹⁵¹

Nuremberg was allowed to exhibit the regalia publicly as objects of veneration once a year, on the fourteenth day after Good Friday. These public displays – the so-called *Heiltumsweisungen* – took place until the onset of the Reformation. The last such display is recorded in 1523.¹⁵² During the rest of the year, and when they were not needed, they were kept in a gilded silver casket hung up high inside the Church of the Holy Spirit in Nuremberg.¹⁵³ So although the garments would still have been stored away from sight and would probably only have been seen during processions and ceremonies, the move to Nuremberg in the fifteenth century and the ensuing veneration of the regalia would have entailed an important shift in the reception of the regalia.

A preliminary sketch for a portrait by Albrecht Dürer gives a particularly clear impression of the ceremonial use of parts of the imperial garments in the early sixteenth century.¹⁵⁴ Here Charlemagne (r. 768–814) is represented, anachronistically

¹⁵⁰ The additions include the stole and eagle dalmatic. FILLITZ (1954).

¹⁵¹ Annelies AMBERGER, Reichskleinodien und Hakenkreuz: Heilige Insignien und bildhafte Symbole im Dienste der Nationalsozialisten, in: Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft 38 (2011), pp. 271–334; ead., Bildhafte Zeichen der Macht als sakrale Symbole in der atheistischen Diktatur. Zur Funktionalisierung der Reichskleinodien durch die Nationalsozialisten, in: Maike STEINKAMP and Bruno REUDENBACH (eds), Mittelalterbilder im Nationalsozialismus, Berlin 2013, pp. 119–35.

¹⁵² FILLITZ (1954), p. 31.

¹⁵³ The silver casket is preserved in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (Inv.-Nr. KG 187).

¹⁵⁴ The painting, also kept in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (GM 167), shows



Fig. 33: Albrecht Dürer, sketch for a portrait of Charlemagne, 1510, Albertina, Vienna.

posing with Roger II's mantle and the stole (Fig. 33)¹⁵⁵ – the Sicilian origin of the mantle had by then been obscured. The (fictitious) connection of the objects represented in Dürer's sketch and painting with the revered founding father of the Holy Roman Empire would have provided a link between the worldly emperors and the sanctity of their idealised predecessor.¹⁵⁶ Charlemagne had been canonised in December 1165 and was made the subject of extensive veneration, particularly under his namesake Emperor Charles IV.¹⁵⁷ Objects associated with the sainted emperor would

only Charlemagne's upper body, while the sketch offers a full-length representation and therefore provides the more valuable sources for the purposes here.

155 The dalmatic represented is the 'eagle dalmatic' (early 14th c., southern Germany), also on display in Vienna.

156 On fictitious attributions of objects to Charlemagne, see Philippe CORDEZ, *Vers un catalogue raisonné des 'objets légendaires' de Charlemagne: Le cas de Conques (XIe-XIIe siècles)*, in: id. (ed.), *Charlemagne et les objets: Des thésaurisations carolingiennes aux constructions mémorielles*, Bern 2012, pp. 135–67.

157 This cult is particularly interesting given the historical background of the somewhat diminished importance of the notion of 'regal sacrality' in the Empire. Charles IV's Golden Bull of 1356 had instituted that a ruler's legitimacy could be established only through election, not through mere anointment and crowning. See Jörg ROGGE, *Die deutschen Könige im Mittelalter: Wahl und Krönung*, Darmstadt 2006, pp. 97–98; Adalbert ERLER, *Karlskult*, in: *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte* (first edition), vol. 2 (1978), pp. 654–57.

therefore have acquired the status of relics. The power of these to draw large crowds of pilgrims was of course a welcome side effect for the city of Nuremberg.¹⁵⁸

The move to Nuremberg and the ensuing shift in the public reception of the Norman garments from the fifteenth century onwards also gave rise to the first printed publications dealing with the garments. Before this date, references to the Norman garments can mainly be traced in inventories. The *Nürnberger Heiltumsbuch*, for example – a first edition with woodcuts was printed in 1487 (Fig. 34) – focuses on the relic-like status of the objects entrusted to the city of Nuremberg and takes the form of a ‘pilgrims’ guide’ to the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁵⁹ The *Heiltumsbuch* contains descriptions of all the objects on display and underlines the great ideological and soteriological value attributed to them at the time. Flyleaves with images of the objects and accompanying text were also circulated with the same intent.¹⁶⁰

Scholarly interest in the regalia, on the other hand, seems to have first arisen in the eighteenth century. This is documented by a number of more or less contemporaneous publications, some of which are richly illustrated.¹⁶¹ Probably the most notable of these is the monumental work on the imperial treasury published under the patronage of the Nuremberg patrician Hieronymus Wilhelm Ebner von Eschenbach, with engravings by Delsenbach, *Wahre Abbildung der sämtlichen Reichskleinodien* (Nuremberg 1790).¹⁶² In the same year, von Murr published his *Beschreibung der sämtlichen Reichskleinodien und Heiligthümer, welche in der des H. R. Reichs freyen Stadt Nürnberg aufbewahret werden* (Nuremberg 1790), a work with a complete description of all

158 Prints emphasising the spiritual value of the regalia were produced in view not only of redemption but prominently also of the immense economic benefits to the city of Nuremberg. See Barbara STOLLBERG-RILLINGER, ‘Die Puppe Karls des Großen’: Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation als praktizierter Mythos, in: Otto DEPENHEUER (ed.), *Mythos als Schicksal: Was konstituiert die Verfassung?*, Wiesbaden 2009, p. 38.

159 See Livia CARDENAS, *Die Textur des Bildes. Das Heiltumsbuch im Kontext religiöser Medialität des Spätmittelalters*, Berlin 2013; Peter PARSHALL, Rainer SCHOCH (eds), *Die Anfänge der europäischen Druckgraphik: Holzschnitte des 15. Jahrhunderts und ihr Gebrauch* (Washington, National Gallery of Art, 2005; Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2005–6), Nuremberg 2005, pp. 212–14; Jutta GOETZMANN, Hans OTTOMEYER, Ansgar REISS (eds), *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation 962 bis 1806*, Dresden 2006, p. 337; Hartmut KÜHNE, *Ostensio reliquiarum: Untersuchungen über Entstehung, Ausbreitung, Gestalt und Funktion der Heiltumsweisungen im römisch-deutschen Regnum*, Berlin 2000.

160 One example is a sixteenth-century flyleaf published by Dietrich von Berg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, *Graphische Sammlung*, Inv. 3613 – 1334.

161 Anna Th. SCHWINGER, *Verständnis und Mißverständnis, Interpretation und Mißinterpretation: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Krönungsornats der Könige und Kaiser des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), pp. 97–108. For a historiographical overview of studies concerned with the imperial regalia more generally, see STOLLBERG-RILLINGER (2009), p. 34; FILLITZ (1954), pp. 6–7.

162 DELSENBACH (1790).

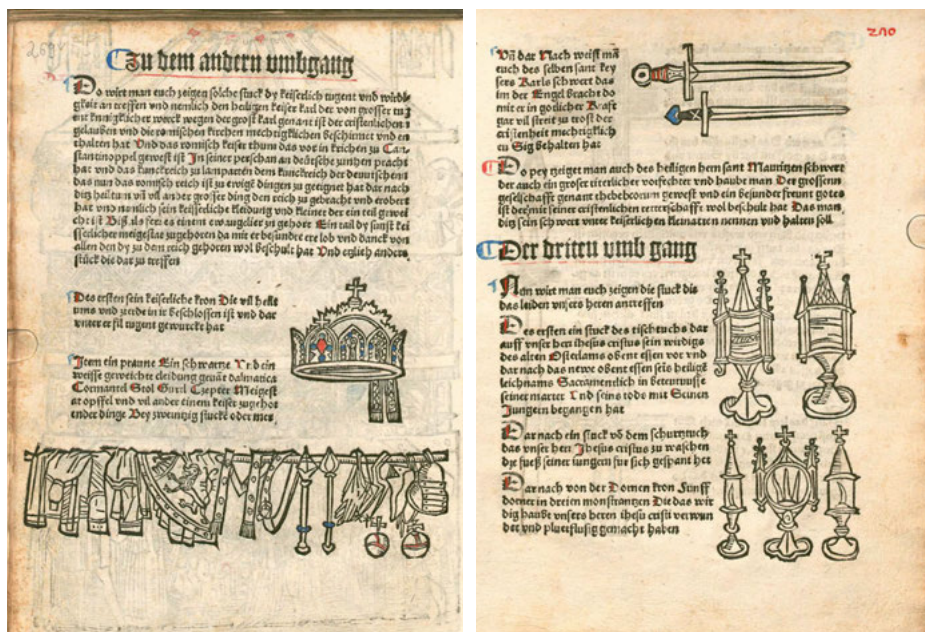


Fig. 34: Illustrated page from the *Nürnbberger Heiltumsbuch*, Nuremberg, 1493, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München, Clm 428/5.

the pieces.¹⁶³ A further two illustrated publications were printed in the second half of the nineteenth century by Franz Bock and Quirin von Leitner,¹⁶⁴ and the imperial regalia has continued to attract scholarly attention in more recent art historical literature.¹⁶⁵ Yet studies such as those assembled in the *Nobiles Officinae* exhibition

¹⁶³ VON MURR (1790). A few years later von Murr published a second work on the imperial regalia formerly kept in Aachen: Christoph Gottlieb VON MURR, *Beschreibung der ehemals zu Aachen aufbewahrten drey kaiserlichen Krönungs-Zierden*, Nuremberg 1801.

¹⁶⁴ Quirin VON LEITNER, *Die hervorragendsten Kunstwerke der Schatzkammer des österreichischen Kaiserhauses*, Vienna 1870–73; Bock, Franz, *Die Kleinodien des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation*, Vienna 1864.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example: Franz KIRCHWEGGER, *Die Reichskleinodien in Nürnberg in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: Heinz SCHILLING, Werner HEUN and Jutta GOETZMANN (eds), *Heiliges Römisches Reich deutscher Nation 962–1806: Altes Reich und neue Staaten: Essays*, Dresden 2006, pp. 187–99; Hans-Jürgen BECKER, Karl-Heinz RUSS (eds), *Die Reichskleinodien: Herrschaftszeichen des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, Göttingen 1997; Julia SCHNELBÖGL, *Die Reichskleinodien in Nürnberg 1424–1523*, in: *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 51 (1972), pp. 70–159; FILLITZ (1954); Julius VON SCHLOSSER, *Die deutschen Reichskleinodien*, Vienna 1920.

catalogue, considering the Norman garments independently of their use in the Holy Roman Empire, let alone in their original context in Sicily, are rare.

3.2 Discovering the Arabic Inscriptions: An Overview of the Sources

None of the early written sources describing the Norman royal garments contain any reference to the textiles' iconography and ornamentation. The first document referring to the garments, the 1246 inventory of the imperial treasury from Trifels Castle mentioned above, names only the objects, mentioning that the garments are decorated with precious stones. The second oldest source, documenting the bestowal of the regalia on Charles IV in 1350, is equally concerned with material matters, but adds two new elements to the short description: the fictitious attribution of the Norman mantle to Charlemagne, and one element of its iconography, the lions.¹⁶⁶ The document from 1423 recording Emperor Sigismund's handing over of the regalia to the city of Nuremberg does not differ much from the previous ones in its focus on naming the pieces and giving brief attention to the material, but it is slightly more specific about the iconography of the mantle, mentioning the camels and that the lions are executed in gold.¹⁶⁷

None of these three early documents show any interest in the 'true' origin of the objects and all of them entirely ignore the Arabic inscriptions. The same can be said about the records of the sixteenth-century restoration of the stockings and alb to mark Charles V's coronation.¹⁶⁸ Inscriptions play no role either in the previously mentioned *Nürnberger Heiltumsbuch* of 1487. The famous Dürer study for a portrait of Charlemagne, on the other hand, does show the written ornament on the mantle. However, it has been reduced to a repetitive linear pattern on the sketch (Fig. 33), while the lower part of the garments has been cropped entirely in the painting itself.

Up to the eighteenth century, the regalia were also regularly mentioned in documents concerning disputes about whether to keep the imperial treasury in Nuremberg. Some critics considered its retention to be inappropriate following the city's conversion to Protestantism. Interestingly, it is in these disputes that we find the first critical considerations of the origins of the pieces contained in the treasury of the

¹⁶⁶ Appendix to *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), p. 325. '[...] ouch ist da eyne weyser rok sent karls, an den armen geworcht mit edelem gesteyne, vnd mit perlen, vnd eyne roter mantel sent karls mit czweyen lewen geworcht von gutem gesteyne perlen und golde [...].'

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 326. '[...] Item ein weiße dalmatica mit perlen an den ermelein, vnd vnder zuring vmb. [...] Item eine rote kappen, mit einem guldein leben (to be read: gulde inleben?), vnd einem camel, mit perlen gestepht [...].'

¹⁶⁸ FILLITZ (1954), pp. 59–60. Quotation from the *Nürnberger Ratsverlässe*: '[...] und die kappen und kniehosen soll unterfüttern lassen. Die closterfrauen zu sant claren'; 'Die weysen kaiser Karls dalmatica die weyl sie altershalb zermodert ist, soll man mit einer neuen weysen seiden umbeziehen.'

Holy Roman Empire. The relic-like status which the garments acquired through their association with the canonised Emperor Charlemagne was rightly questioned.¹⁶⁹

A first impetus for learned exchanges on the inscriptions of the Norman garments appears to have been given by scholars taking an interest in the Arabic inscription of the mantle in the eighteenth century. This impetus is documented around 1790, for example, in the above-mentioned work by Delsenbach and in von Murr's description of the regalia. Both works are the results of very close study of the garments and demonstrate – with images in the former case, and text in the latter – that the Arabic written ornament had not only been identified as such, but had also been studied for its content. This close study may have been prompted, in part, by the commissioning of textile replicas of the Norman garments; these were made in 1764 to mark the coronation of Joseph II. Further impetus may have been given by the opening of the royal tombs of Palermo in 1781. The discovery of a great number of textiles, partly related to those kept in the imperial treasury, seems to have drawn further attention to the Norman garments and their Sicilian provenance.

3.3 From Legible Script to Meaningless Ornament:

Arabic Inscriptions on the Eighteenth-Century Copies of the Norman Garments

Another instance of the reception of the Norman garments and indeed an 'interpretation' is the Baroque copies of the regalia from the mid-eighteenth century. They were commissioned by Emperor Francis I of Lorraine (1708–1765), who needed garments equalling the true regalia to be worn by his son Joseph II at his coronation as the Roman–German king on 3 April 1764. These copies seem to have been made in little more than a year.¹⁷⁰ In order to provide the models for the Viennese artisans who were entrusted with the task of producing these copies, life-size drawings on paper – which no longer survive – were ordered from the engraver Wolfgang Nikolaus Reif of Nuremberg. Incidentally, after the coronation took place in Frankfurt, the king's outfit was ridiculed by no less than Johann-Wolfgang von Goethe, who was present as an observer during the procession.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 6–7.

¹⁷⁰ Anna Th. SCHWINGER, *Der Ornat Kaiser Franz I. Stephan von Lothringen. Barockkopien nach dem Krönungsornat des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), p. 137.

¹⁷¹ *'Der junge König hingegen schleppte sich in den ungeheuren Gewandstücken mit den Kleinodien Karls des Großen, wie in einer Verkleidung, einher, so dass er selbst, von Zeit zu Zeit seinen Vater ansehend, sich des Lächelns nicht enthalten konnte. Die Krone, welche man sehr hatte füttern müssen, stand wie ein übergreifendes Dach vom Kopf ab. Die Dalmatika, die Stola, so gut sie auch angepasst und eingnäht worden, gewährte doch keineswegs ein vorteilhaftes Aussehen.'* Johann-Wolfgang VON GOETHE, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Leipzig 1952, p. 209.



Fig. 35: Mantle of Emperor Francis I of Lorraine, 18th-c. copy of the Norman mantle, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



Fig. 36: Stockings of Francis I of Lorraine, 18th-c. copy of the Norman stockings, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

In the making of these garments, only the inscription on the mantle was copied faithfully (Fig. 35). It is legible in most parts and was clearly understood as an inscription, rather than an abstract ornament. This can also be seen in representations of the new mantle in other media, in which the inscription clearly appears as a script – it is irregular and not subjected to the regularity of an ornamental pattern.¹⁷² The inscriptions on the stockings, on the other hand, were observed less carefully. Although the tapestry bands of the originals are inscribed with a continuous phrase and thus show different words on the left and right stockings, the copies have bands with the

¹⁷² Examples include a painting of the Emperor Francis I by Wenzel Pohl and a sculpted full-length figure by Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. See *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), pp. 230 and 232, figs 1, 2.



Fig. 37: Alb of Francis I of Lorraine, 18th-c. copy of the Norman alb, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

same pattern. Some of the original letter forms remain, but they are transformed into abstract ornaments (Fig. 36).

The textile copy of the alb, in contrast, is remarkable for its clear transformation of both the Latin and the Arabic inscriptions of the original into ornamental pseudo-script.¹⁷³ In contrast to the original Norman alb, the hem of which has been sewn out of four pieces, each repeating the same inscriptions twice, once at the top and once at the bottom, the hem of the copy has only two parts (Fig. 37). While the original clearly states in legible Latin that it was made for a particular king, at a particular time and place, there seems to have been a decision during one of the stages of the production of the copy (no longer identifiable since Reif's drawings are lost) to retain the form but discard the content of the original in favour of a regular ornament. This reduction in complexity can also be observed in the reversal of the figurative pattern, which is no longer upside down at the front right. Those who provided the drawing and the pattern for the copy clearly kept the sense of repetition inherent in the ornament of the model. Nevertheless, the intervals of repetition have been considerably shortened and sim-

¹⁷³ SCHWINGER (2004a), p. 100.

plified.¹⁷⁴ It is, of course, possible that the models were not observed carefully, or the ornament simplified because of practical issues of time and cost. However, whether intentional or not, the process of ornamentalisising the original inscriptions deprives the alb of its historical references and thus completely alters its original function, which, as I argue in the last chapter, appears to have been distinctly legal.

The transformation of legible Arabic script into ‘meaningless’ ornament, visible on all three of these copies, is one which is often taken for granted in discussions of the transfer of objects and forms from the Arabic to the Latin sphere. The common assumption is that there was a purely aesthetic reception of Arabic forms; it is thought that they would not have been permissible if their original function or meaning – possibly a religious one – had been known. However, while this can be verified for the specific example of the eighteenth-century textile copies, the remainder of this chapter shows that the matter is far more complex and that ‘meaninglessness’ is not necessarily a precondition for transcultural transfer.

3.4 Triumphalist Interpretations of Arabic Script on the Norman Royal Garments

The collective attempt of various scholars to decipher the inscriptions and the scholarly correspondence between Sicily and Germany seems to have provided a first occasion for both groups of garments – those in the Vienna group and those newly discovered in the royal tombs in Palermo – to be considered as related pieces of historical evidence. The readings and interpretations of the Arabic inscriptions proposed are transcribed in von Murr and Daniele’s publications.

Despite a few inaccuracies, von Murr’s various publications on the garments in the 1780s (until 1790) are particularly fascinating since they contain technical descriptions, transcriptions and translations of the inscriptions found on the mantle, stockings and alb, and some interesting comments on the placement of the inscriptions and their reception. Von Murr appears to have taken a particularly great interest in the mantle’s inscription: he made a drawing, commissioned a woodcut, and asked for help with the translation.¹⁷⁵ However, in his description of the Norman alb, von

¹⁷⁴ The band of pseudo-Latin is reduced to the twelve letter sequences of ‘O P V B T E V N S G W H’ at the top, interspaced by dots and a cross at each new beginning of a sequence, and ‘M E R I O V B T A R I O’ at the bottom. The band below is occupied by pseudo-Arabic letter forms which follow the repetitive pattern of the Latin letters above.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Auf diesen drey und einen viertels Zoll breiten Rand, ist zwischen zwey gedoppelten Perleneinfassungen eine arabische Aufschrift in kufischen goldenen Buchstaben prächtig gesticket, wovon die höchsten zwey und dreiviertels Zoll hoch sind. Sie fängt zu unterst auf der rechten Seite des Mantels an. Ich habe sie auf dem Pluvial selbst durchgezeichnet, und 1777 in Holz schneiden lassen. Sie ist dieser Beschreibung beigegefügt, und hier ist sie auch mit neu arabischen Lettern, welche mir Herr Breitkopf verehrte.’ Von Murr (1790), pp. 39–42.

Murr rather curiously provides only a reading of its Latin inscription. Although he recognised the Arabic forms of the accompanying ornament, he did not believe that it had any linguistic content:¹⁷⁶

‘At the very bottom there is a very large hem, which is in fact divided into five. The first and fourth contain a large array of watered (?) traits, which one might at first sight mistake for Kufic or ancient Arabic script. But they are only parts of silk weaving.’

Unlike the inscription on the mantle, therefore, the Arabic inscription on the alb is considered here for its ‘Kufesque’ form solely; there is no more careful observation which could have revealed its linguistic content.

In contrast to the remarkably accurate analysis and transcription of the long Kufic inscription of the mantle, and the complete denial of meaning to the Arabic inscription on the alb, the one on the stockings seems to have been observed, but only superficially:¹⁷⁷

‘They have a large hem at the top [...] On this band I have discovered Arabic writing. The script ought to be read in reverse because the tailor has sewn that which was meant for the outside, inwards. This Arabic script from a present of humiliated Saracens is the same on both stockings, as far as one can see. The outlines are very unclear because they were sewn on the wrong way.’

The author then mistakenly assumes that both inscribed bands carry the same textual content (*‘splendida regia fascia tibialium – ein prächtiges königliches Strumpfband’*), and he says, surprisingly, that the inscription was embroidered, rather than woven. Furthermore, he states that the inscribed bands were attached to the stockings inside out, so that they have to be read in mirror-reverse. There are several occasions on which they could have been attached this way, including the original production of the stockings, the reworking under Frederick II, or their restoration in the sixteenth century.¹⁷⁸ What is most interesting, however, is von Murr’s natural assumption that the Arabic textile inscription must have been a present from ‘humiliated Saracens’,

¹⁷⁶ ‘Zu unterst ist ein überaus breiter Saum, der eigentlich fünffach ist. Der erste und vierte hat allerhand Züge, die wie gewässert aussehen, und die man dem ersten Ansehen nach für kufische oder altarabische Schriftzüge ansehen sollte. Aber es sind bloß Züge von Seidengewebe.’ Ibid., pp. 36–37.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Oben haben sie einen breiten Rand [...]. Auf diesem Streife [...] habe ich arabische Schriftzüge entdeckt. Die Schrift muß umgekehrt gelesen werden. Denn der Schneider hat das was außen stehen sollte, einwärts genähet. Diese arabische Schrift eines Geschenkes gedemüthigter Saracenen ist auf beyden Strümpfen einerley, so viel man bemerken kann. Denn die Züge sind sehr undeutlich, weil sie umgekehrt aufgenähet sind.’ This is followed by Tychsen’s inaccurate reading, first transcribed into Hebrew letters, transliterated, translated into Latin as *‘splendida regia fascia tibialium’*, and finally given in German: *‘ein prächtiges königliches Strumpfband.’* Ibid., pp. 44–45.

¹⁷⁸ FILLITZ (1954), p. 60.

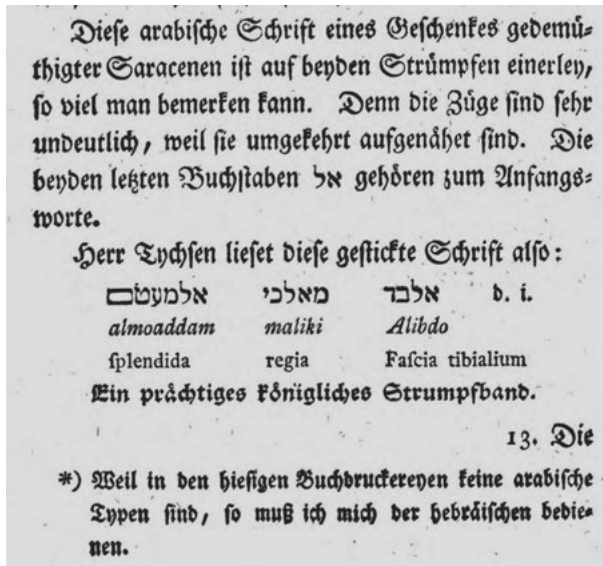


Fig. 38: Von Murr's description of the stockings, 1790, detail.

which gives us an interesting insight into the eighteenth-century interpretation and reception of the Arabic writing (Fig. 38).

The same natural assumption, that there is a hierarchical relation of domination and submission symbolised by the appropriation of the form of Arabic script in the Latin context, can also be seen in von Murr's first comprehensive publication on the mantle. Here, the beginning of the inscription is translated as reading 'what was made *for* the royal workshop' (rather than *in* the workshop), thus implying that the mantle ought to be considered a tribute to the Norman ruler.¹⁷⁹ Oluf Tychsen's reading and interpretation of the inscriptions on Frederick II's funerary alb, already mentioned in the presentation of the garment, goes in the same direction. According to Tychsen, the inscription bears witness to the fact that the garment was given to the German Emperor Otto IV (1175–1218) by submissive Sicilian 'Mauris' and then passed on to Otto's main rival, Frederick II.¹⁸⁰ Tychsen's conclusions on the origins of this alb

¹⁷⁹ Christoph Gottlieb VON MURR, Fortsetzung der ausführlichen Beschreibung der Rechtsinsignien: Das Pluviale, in: *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur* 15 (1787), p. 251.

¹⁸⁰ DANIELE (1784), pp. 104–05. '*Albam hanc Othoni IV. ad annum 1211 quum Apuliam et Calabriam Maurorum forte ope debellasset, jamque in eo esset, ut exercitum in Siciliam trajiceret, oblatam a Mauris Siculis fuisse, ut eorum patrocinium susciperet, simile vero mihi videtur. Atque hinc facile intellegitur, quare Fredericus II. post Othonis ex Italia discessum, Mauros omnes Sicilia ejecerit. Quidquid ejus sit, tamen miratio me subit, qui fieri potuerit, ut Friderici II. cadaver alba Othoni IV. adversario suo donata, vestiretur; et quod maius adhuc est, reges Christiani vestimentis ab infidelibus confectis, et eorum characteribus insignitis, tam in actu coronationis, ut ad nostra usque tempora, mos iste Imperatoris Romani humeros pallio arabico onerandi descendit, quam in sepultura induti fuerint.*'

and its association with Otto IV were based on his extensive historical knowledge, but are not supported by the actual material evidence. In fact, Tychsen's interpretation goes awry not only because it is impossible from the remaining evidence of the alb's inscriptions to recognise the letter shapes necessary to form the words 'Otto IV', but also because he ignores the fact that there would very probably have been many more albs, and many more Arabic textiles in the treasury of the emperor than those accounted for in literary sources,¹⁸¹ or indeed more than those which had entered the treasury as booty. In addition, unless this was done on request, it is also highly unlikely that 'infidels' would have made a garment based on the shapes of Christian liturgical vestments.

Nevertheless, Tychsen and von Murr raise some important points about the reception of Arabic script as an ornament in Latin Europe. In both cases above, the textiles are said to have been made by Muslim craftsmen: the Arabic language is naturally perceived as a sign of Muslim faith. The fact that the inscribed garments were made for, and worn by, the Norman rulers is interpreted in terms of an opposition between Islam and Christianity. In these scholars' opinion, Arabic textile inscriptions thus had to be considered as incongruous intrusions into the Christian vocabulary of royal representation, in need of explanation. The explanation is simple for Tychsen and von Murr: they are signs of Muslim submission and Christian triumph. While this is too one-dimensional an interpretation to be valid, it is important to be aware of this type of historical reception of Arabic inscriptions in Latin Christian contexts and of its repercussions on later art historical perceptions and analyses of the Norman garments.

4 Approaches to Arabic Inscriptions in European Medieval Arts: Methodological Considerations

The modern impulse to classify according to provenance and the subsequent association with the religious context of origin are both elements that appear to have been largely irrelevant to the use of textiles in medieval Europe. This is not only verified by the analysis of material sources, but can also be traced in written documents. Medieval inventories often merely emphasise the types and value of the textiles, but do not reveal any interest in discriminating between foreign Christian or Islamic imports, if provenances are mentioned at all.¹⁸² The presence of Arabic ornamental inscriptions in medieval Christian contexts demonstrates the permeability of cultural spheres and

¹⁸¹ According to Otto IV's will, the regalia, including some of his garments, were ordered to be handed over to Frederick II. See: Andreas W. VETTER et al. (eds), *Otto IV.: Traum vom welfischen Kaisertum* (Braunschweig, Landesmuseum, 2009), Petersberg 2009, pp. 474–75.

¹⁸² BISCHOFF (1967).

the flexibility of boundaries. Moreover, it also clearly highlights the need for contextualisation – often lacking in the literature on Arabic inscriptions in Latin Europe – in the search for the meaning and function of this particular kind of ornament.

In fact, many of the older articles on the subject are mere catalogues of cases in which Arabic script or pseudo-script is used in non-Islamic contexts. Rather than analysing these specific occurrences in their local context, the motif of Arabic script is presented as a migrating source of ‘influence’ with repercussions on the arts of medieval Europe. In more recent studies, on the other hand, the presence of Arabic inscriptions in Latin contexts has been studied through the lens of the concept of ‘transfer’, which has shifted the emphasis from the observation of two static entities linked through the notion of ‘influence’ to an observation of the processes underlying the transcultural exchange producing these inscriptions. I give an example of these approaches below, before turning to their impact on the interpretation of the Norman garments.

4.1 From ‘Influence’ to ‘Transfer’: Studies of Arabic Inscriptions in Latin Europe

Two particularly interesting articles of the first, rigorously formalist kind were published by Kurt Erdmann and S. P. Spittle in 1953.¹⁸³ Erdmann’s catalogue traces examples of ornaments in medieval European art which, according to the author, betray the influence of Kufic forms. He follows a chronological structure, within which these ornamental motifs of Kufic inspiration are classified according to their provenance and the different media on which they appear. Erdmann includes examples of architectural ornament, of ornament in wall-, book- and panel-painting, stained-glass and metalwork, as well as in wood- and ivory-carving. Spittle is equally inclusive of the media in which the Arabic forms are found, but he focuses exclusively on legible Kufic inscriptions in different Christian contexts, including Byzantium. He raises the questions of the models for this type of ornamentation and its possible meaning. The main themes in these articles on the reception of Kufic and Kufesque forms in Western contexts are whether or not the writing is legible, if stylistic considerations allow one to trace the origin of an ornament, and whether Arabic writing had any particular connotations. Another question concerns the extent to which Arabic inscriptions ought to be considered as ornaments imbued with an inherently Islamic religious character.

¹⁸³ S. Denys T. SPITTLE, Cufic Lettering in Christian Art, in: *The Archaeological Journal* 110 (1953), pp. 138–52; Kurt ERDMANN, Arabische Schriftzeichen als Ornamente in der abendländischen Kunst des Mittelalters, in: *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz. Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse* 9 (1953), pp. 467–513.

These are important questions and themes, many of which are also addressed in more recent articles.¹⁸⁴ What is problematic, however, about Erdmann and Spittle's 'cumulative' and decontextualised approach is the implicit promotion of a universalising conception of Arabic script as an ornament which would have been used and perceived in the same way wherever it was employed. In fact, both articles focus on Arabic inscriptions as isolated motifs, thus dissociating the Kufic and Kufesque forms entirely from the objects and monuments which they adorn, as well as from the broader socio-historical context in which each of them is employed.

A further fundamental problem with Erdmann and Spittle's catalogues, which has already been raised in the overview of selected material sources, lies in the authors' implicit assumption of clearly traceable boundaries between the place of origin of a particular motif and the context of its reception. Their starting point is the assumption that there were clearly defined cultural entities and that the ornament crossed the boundaries from one to the other. Regions such as Sicily, southern Italy or medieval Spain, for example, which do not fit into the clear-cut scheme of 'Islamic and Christian spheres', or 'East and West' are explicitly excluded from their catalogues.¹⁸⁵ However, Arabic textile inscriptions from Sicily cannot be considered signs of passive cultural mingling produced by the particular historical circumstances of medieval Sicily. Sicily was under Muslim rule before its conquest by the Normans. And as shown earlier with regard to the debate surrounding the indebtedness of sericulture and weaving to Byzantine or Arab traditions, sericulture also appears to have been established on the island in pre-Norman times. But – as the following chapter demonstrates – there was no local tradition of textile inscriptions which could have 'influenced' Norman textile production, or which could have been taken over. The use of Arabic textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily ought to be considered as a sign of an intentional adaptation of an Arab ornamental motif to the Norman artistic idiom. It seems more useful, therefore, to approach the Norman textile inscriptions through another notion – the idea of transfer, of movement across cultural boundaries.

As I have briefly shown in the introduction, the concept is derived primarily from Michel Espagne's theoretical considerations on modern Franco-German relations and has only recently been applied to historical and art historical studies of interactions in the medieval Mediterranean.¹⁸⁶ Speaking of movements of transfer across cultural boundaries provides a frame within which elements perceived as 'foreign' to any particular context can be studied, not as the remnants of indefinite and passive 'influ-

184 For example, in the article mentioned above on the reception of the Arabic-inscribed plate in thirteenth-century Byzantium. NELSON (2005).

185 Erdmann refers to these regions as areas with an Arabic-European '*Mischkultur*'. Spittle calls them 'outposts of Moslem culture in Europe.' ERDMANN (1953), p. 467; SPITTLE (1953), p. 138.

186 See ESPAGNE (1999). Its impact on the study of the arts of the medieval Mediterranean is analysed in ABDELLATIF et al. (2012).

ences' that need to be traced, but with an emphasis on active reception and adaptation and as parts of a complex whole.

The alb's bilingual inscription alone, for example, can be considered an embodiment of varying parallel layers of transfer. The object transferred is the motif of Arabic writing – more precisely of a type of writing which has been identified as an Arabic cursive script (Thuluth) reminiscent of the Ayyubid style.¹⁸⁷ Its presence on William II's alb evidences the material transfer of an ornamental form across two cultural spaces: an indefinite Arabo-Islamic culture in which the motif originated, and the multilingual Norman Christian court of Sicily in which it was received, adapted and 'translated' through juxtaposition with a Latin inscription. Objects from Islamic regions are known to have been in circulation between the different Mediterranean courts and cultures. It is therefore likely that inscribed portable objects would have been among the agents which brought this particular motif to the workshops of Norman Sicily.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, the alb's inscription was the product of another type of agency, namely that of the Arab artisans responsible for the conception and technical execution of the embroidery's ornamental scheme in the Norman king's workshop.

Focusing on Roger's mantle, Eva Hoffman analysed the possible reasons underlying the active appropriation of Arabic script in the Norman court of Sicily. She proposed interpreting this ornamental motif as a recognisable sign of the Norman king's cosmopolitanism and of the 'reversal of power' in Sicily from Muslim to Christian rule – the inscription being a visual expression of the idea that 'Roger's control and mastery extends to the language and culture of his adversaries.'¹⁸⁹ While this interpretation derived from an acknowledgement that a movement of transfer must have taken place (in this case the appropriation of Arabic script as a royal ornament) is highly plausible, it is still fundamentally based on the assumption that an Arabic inscription was a 'sign of Islamic culture.'¹⁹⁰ As such, it comes to stand between two separate cultural entities defined by religious affiliation and personified, in this case, by the Latin Christian king on the one hand, and his Muslim subjects and predecessors on the other.

However, cultural boundaries appear to have been blurred not only at the Norman court, where Arabic language and culture – though perhaps not the Islamic religion – were omnipresent.¹⁹¹ It was also the case in the workshop in which the royal garments were produced and, as we have seen, craftsmen of different cultural backgrounds

187 AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 22.

188 On the role of objects as the agents of transfer, see David KNIPP, *Some Aspects of Style and Heritage in the Norman Stanza*, in: id. (2003/4), pp. 175–207; HOFFMAN (2001). The specific role of textiles in the transmission of ornamental motifs is addressed in GOLOMBEK (1988).

189 HOFFMAN (2001), p. 32.

190 *Ibid.*, p. 33. 'Beyond the legibility and authenticity of the text, the Arabic script was recognized in the first place as the sign of Islamic culture.'

191 On the presence of 'palace Saracens' and eunuchs who were Muslim converts at the Norman court, see Chapter 9 in JOHNS (2002).

were employed. These ideas prompt us to envisage an alternative approach to the garments' Arabic inscriptions. The thesis of a shared culture of objects in the medieval Mediterranean courts provides another methodological means of studying the inscribed mantle and alb and fully acknowledging their diverse sources.

4.2 Mediterranean Studies: The Shared Culture of Objects as a Methodological Tool

The conceptual groundwork for the analysis of medieval Mediterranean objects as culturally and stylistically related, rather than distinct, was done by Oleg Grabar. His thesis of a 'shared culture of objects' in the courts of the medieval Mediterranean is based on his observation that it is often difficult – if not impossible – to establish the provenances of certain high-quality objects, such as ivories or textiles, because they do not openly display religious affiliations and were used and appreciated in Christian and Muslim courts alike.¹⁹² According to Grabar, the circulation of these objects across political boundaries through trade and diplomacy resulted in the establishment of a Mediterranean courtly aesthetic,¹⁹³ in which the religious appurtenance of the objects' makers had no or only little importance. Grabar's thesis provides the grounds for new perspectives on objects such as the Norman garments. Acknowledging a 'shared culture of objects' and a shared Mediterranean aesthetic frees the objects from the search for their origins and 'influences'. Moreover, it has paved the way for studies in which objects such as the mantle and alb can be analysed in the local context of their production and use. The benefits of such 'site-specific readings' are obvious, shown, for example, in William Tronzo's article on Roger II's mantle.¹⁹⁴

Although Tronzo has rightly criticised Grabar's 'temporal vagueness' and lack of interest in analyses of 'culturally hybrid' objects in their specific contexts,¹⁹⁵ attributing objects to a shared Mediterranean court culture allows for a different means of categorisation, one defined by social status rather than religious or cultural belonging. This opens questions about the meaning or function of these objects in specific courtly contexts. Tronzo proposes studying the mantle as a whole, laying particular emphasis on the relationship between the inscription and the iconography. Ignoring the origins of the different motifs, Tronzo looks at its ornamentation within the

¹⁹² They do not fit into 'the narrow boundaries imposed by religious art or within the art sponsored by the faiths involved, but [...] belong to a common court art of luxury [...].' GRABAR (1997), p. 63.

¹⁹³ The question to what extent this court culture can or should be limited to the Mediterranean sphere surely needs to be asked, but rather exceeds the scope of the present study.

¹⁹⁴ TRONZO (2001), p. 244.

¹⁹⁵ William TRONZO, *Regarding Norman Sicily: Art, Identity and Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, in: KNIPP (2003/4), p. 108. Tronzo raises this criticism with regards to the Venice cup, stating that objects such as these 'are mined exclusively for their parts – for the mere fact of hybridity – as opposed to whatever might be imagined to make these parts cohere as whole.'

local context of its use at the Norman court of Sicily. This leads him to juxtapose the mantle's iconography with Norman representations of idealised gardens on coins, in mosaics and in manuscript illumination, and with the decorative programme initiated by Roger II in the royal palace and chapel.¹⁹⁶ Through this contextualising approach, Tronzo demonstrates that the arts originating from the Norman court, including the iconography and inscription of Roger's mantle, share a vocabulary that aimed at conveying the image of the king as a rightful, ideal ruler, and did so at a crucial time shortly after the proclamation of his kingship.¹⁹⁷

4.3 A Meaningless Transfer of Forms?

Despite the obvious merits of approaching Arabic inscriptions in medieval Latin Europe through the notions of transfer and shared court culture, the approaches share a certain formalism in that they assume that this ornament was appreciated in Europe purely for its aesthetic qualities and under the precondition of religious neutrality.¹⁹⁸ It is, however, particularly difficult, if not impossible, to draw a firm line between 'secular' and 'religious' for the period relevant to this study.¹⁹⁹

The Norman kings, for example, deliberately encouraged the blurring of boundaries between what we perceive as the religious and secular realms. This blurring is seen not only in the liturgical shape of the remaining Norman ceremonial garments, but also, for example, in the mosaic representation of Roger II being crowned by Christ in the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio in Palermo (Fig. 39). A similar phenomenon can be observed for the episcopal thrones in southern Italy, which very clearly use a type of visual vocabulary usually associated with the courtly sphere.²⁰⁰ The clear modern distinction between secular and religious realms is not reflected in medieval reality. To mention but one other example: the Fatimid caliphs were not only the secular rulers of their territories, but also claimed religious primacy over the community of believers. Their palace was a sacred space, their ceremonies imbued with religious overtones.²⁰¹ It is thus not only restrictive but also problematic to consider 'secularism' the prerequisite of transfer between Latin and Arabic cultures. It

¹⁹⁶ TRONZO (2001), p. 249. The wording of the inscription and the iconography of the mantle can also be related to the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁹⁸ NELSON (2005).

¹⁹⁹ DORIS BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF, *Beyond the Secular and the Sacred: Qur'anic Inscriptions in Medieval Islamic Art and Material Culture*, in: Fahmida SULEMAN (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions*, Oxford 2007, pp. 41–49.

²⁰⁰ André GRABAR, *Trônes épiscopaux du XI^e et XII^e siècle en Italie méridionale*, in: Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch 16 (1954), pp. 7–52.

²⁰¹ Paula SANDERS, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, New York 1994.



Fig. 39: Christ crowning Roger II, mosaic, Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, Palermo.

is indeed extremely difficult to dissociate the secular and religious in a way that is thorough enough to allow us to consider court culture in isolation.

Although Grabar's theory of a shared court culture explicitly refers only to secular *objects*, these are evidently inseparable from the ornaments which adorn them. One question relevant here, therefore, is to what extent ornament, or certain types of ornament, such as Arabic writing, can be classified as having religious connotations? Most 'religious' or 'secular' objects derive their classification from their function within a specific context (a mosque lamp or a church paten, for example, can definitely be said to belong to a 'religious mode'), but these modes may change if the object is transferred to a different context. Other objects are embellished with ornaments with religious connotations, whether these work through iconographic references to religious figures, signs and symbols, or indeed through the content of inscriptions. But such connotations require the audience to be familiar with the scenes represented, or have the ability to associate certain motifs, such as the cross or the Arabic name of God (*Allāh*), with something that is usually found in a religious context.

The acknowledgement of a commonality of taste, a shared appreciation of specific forms, materials and motifs in the medieval Mediterranean between the tenth and twelfth centuries, adds a further element to Grabar's object-centred thesis, in which ornaments can be studied as vehicles of transfer independently of the objects

they adorn. Fashion, or taste, which give the impetus for the shared court culture, are categories which certainly impacted the transfer of ornament and textiles between Islamic and Christian contexts, transcending religious boundaries. Coptic Christians in Egypt by no means objected to having Arabic inscriptions on their garments.²⁰² The same can be said of the Byzantine dignitaries in eleventh-century Cappadocia, who are documented to have worn Arabic *ṭirāz* inscriptions on their dresses and turbans.²⁰³ It is thus beneficial to think about the concept of a shared taste in order to expand the notion of a shared culture of *objects* which differentiates between sacred and secular modes, and to assess the role of ornament in the movements of cultural transfer in the medieval Mediterranean.

Although the benefits of the notion of shared taste are clear, it is unable to account for the choices underlying the use of an ornamental motif in a specific context. This is particularly relevant for the study of royal textiles, since ceremonial artefacts were used to convey or emphasise a certain image of the ruler. For example, interpretations such as Tronzo's, which emphasise the local context of the mantle's use, may be incapable of accounting for the delivery of the mantle's political message through the intermediary of an idealising representation of nature, as well as through the Arabic language and its idiosyncratic form. Within the methodological frame of a shared Mediterranean courtly taste, inscriptions on the Norman royal garments run the risk of being reduced to the status of an ornament that was appealing in form, but was devoid of any deliberate content or function.

Of course we cannot assume that the inscriptions on the mantle or alb would necessarily have been read. They are small and difficult to decipher, and would have been still harder to read when the garments were being worn. This is an aspect of the visibility, indeed of the invisibility of the inscriptions, which will be addressed in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, their content is legible, highly individual, and reveals a degree of sophistication which would be entirely unnecessary if the presence of writing on the Norman royal textiles merely reflected a formal transfer justified by a shared courtly taste. This suggests that at least at the time of the production of these garments, particular attention was paid not only to the evocative form, but also to the content of these inscriptions. The adoption of this type of ornament on the Norman mantle and alb, for example, is thus to be considered the result of a conscious choice motivated not only by an aesthetic appreciation and appropriation of an Arabic form, but also by a more specific knowledge of the inscriptions' meanings and functions.

202 Jacques VAN DER VLIET, 'In a Robe of Gold': Status, Magic and Politics on Inscribed Christian Textiles from Egypt, in: Căcilia FLUCK and Gisela HELMECKE (eds), *Textile Messages: Inscribed Fabrics from Roman to Abbasid Egypt*, Leiden 2006, pp. 32–33.

203 Lyn RODLEY, *Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia*, Cambridge 1985, p. 199, Fig. 38; and Jennifer BALL, *Byzantine Dress: Representations of Secular Dress in Eighth- to Twelfth-Century Painting*, New York 2005.

Chapter II

An Imported Ornament? Comparing the Functions of Textile Inscriptions in Sicily and Fatimid Egypt

Offering an additional perspective to the analysis of the transfer and the reception of Arabic textile inscriptions in the frame of Latin and Mediterranean court culture, this chapter focuses on the production of the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions and investigates their relation to Arabic court culture, where textile inscriptions (*ṭirāz*) were common.¹ They could be signs of high social rank and imbued with a distinct political function, but they also had other functions, such as providing amuletic protection to their wearer. While Arabic inscriptions may – in many cases – have been appreciated exclusively for their form (in both Latin and Arabic contexts), this is too reductive an explanation to account for the use of Arabic inscriptions on the Norman Sicilian textiles.

Taking as my starting point a comparison of the Norman textile inscriptions with *ṭirāz* textiles from Fatimid Egypt (969–1171), I argue that there was an awareness at the Norman court of the functions of textile inscriptions as ornament in contemporary Arabic court culture. However, the comparison also shows that the Norman court did not simply adopt the Arabic *ṭirāz* tradition as it was: differences in the circumstances of production, style and content of the inscriptions demonstrate that the appropriation of this ornament in Norman Sicily was highly selective. A close observation of Arabic-inscribed textiles from a comparative perspective helps to highlight transformations that occur in the course of the transfer of Arabic script as an ornamental motif to Norman Sicily. Moreover, the contextual analysis also shows that the meaning and function of an ornament in transfer may vary depending upon where and when it is used.²

There is ample evidence of contact between the Fatimids and Norman Sicily,³ yet I do not wish to suggest that Fatimid–Norman relations necessarily had more weight

¹ The term *ṭirāz* derives from the Persian *ṭarāz* (adornment or embellishment) and originally meant embroidery or decoration. In both secondary literature and sources, however, the term can be found with three different meanings: a textile inscription, a textile which carries an inscription, or a workshop in which inscribed textiles are produced. For a definition of *ṭirāz*, see, for example: Lisa GOLOMBEK, Veronika GERVERS, Tiraz Fabrics in the Royal Ontario Museum, in: Veronika GERVERS (ed.), *Studies in Textile History in Memory of Harold B. Burnham*, Toronto 1977, p. 82; Gisela HELMECKE, Tiraz-Inschriften im Berliner Museum für Islamische Kunst, in: FLUCK/HELMECKE (2006), p. 175.

² In this I concur with Paula Sanders' central thesis of the multiplicity of meanings and functions of Fatimid rituals. SANDERS (1994), p. 6.

³ Jeremy JOHNS, The Norman Kings of Sicily and the Fatimid Caliphate, in: *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993), pp. 133–59.

than contacts with other centres of the medieval Mediterranean. Relations between Norman Sicily and contemporary Ifriqiya and the Western Mediterranean, for example, have been largely overlooked,⁴ although – as I argue in Chapter 4 – contacts with these regions may well have been important not only to Norman silk production, but also to the Norman kings' use of Arabic public inscriptions. However, the comparison proposed here, of Sicilian textiles with those of Fatimid Egypt, is motivated and helped by the fact that Fatimid textiles are extraordinarily well documented in both material and written sources.⁵ Large quantities of remarkably well-preserved Fatimid burial textiles have been discovered in archaeological excavations.⁶ Moreover, a number of primary sources provide information on the social status and meaning of Fatimid *ṭirāz* textiles. These include the documents of the Cairo *geniza*,⁷ the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*,⁸ and the writings of two Mamlūk historiographers, al-Qalqashandī and al-Maqrīzī. Al-Maqrīzī mentions ceremonies as contributing to shaping the city in

4 This problem was raised in a special issue of *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* issued in spring 2013: Alexander METCALFE and Mariam ROSSER-OWEN (eds), *Forgotten Connections? Medieval Material Culture and Exchange in the Central and Western Mediterranean*, *Al-Masaq* 25/1 (2013). For example: Isabelle DOLEZALEK, *Textile Connections? Two Ifriqiyān Church Treasuries in Norman Sicily and the Problem of Continuity across Political Change*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 92–112; and KAPITAIKIN (2013). See also David KNIPP, *Art and Form in Norman Sicily, 1130–1189. An Introduction*, in *ibid.* (2003/4), p. 34.

5 Publications on Fatimid textiles include: SOKOLY (2002); Paula SANDERS, *Robes of Honor in Fatimid Egypt*, in: Stewart GORDON (ed.), *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, New York 2001, pp. 225–39; Irene A. BIERMAN, *Inscribing the City: Fatimid Cairo*, in: Karel OTAVSKY (ed.), *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme* (Riggisberger Berichte 5), Bern 1997, pp. 105–14; Georgette CORNU, *Les tissus dans le monde arabo-islamique oriental jusqu'à l'époque mamlūke*, in: *ead.* (ed.), *Tissus d'Égypte: Témoins du monde arabe VIIIe–XIVe siècles*. Collection Bouvier (Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1993–94; Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, 1994), Geneva 1993, pp. 22–29; Muhammad Abdil Aziz MARZOUK, *History of the Textile Industry in Alexandria, 331 B.C.–1517 A.D.*, Alexandria 1955; MARZOUK (1943); Muḥammad 'Abd al-Aziz MARZŪK, *Al-zakhrafa al-mansūja fi al-aqmisha al-fāṭimiya*, Cairo 1942; Ali Bey BAGHAT, *Les manufactures d'étoffe en Égypte au Moyen Age*, in: *Bulletin de l'Institut Egyptien* 4 (1903), pp. 351–61. More generally on Fatimid art, see, for example: Jonathan BLOOM, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt*, New Haven, London 2007; BARRUCAND (1999); Anna CONTADINI, *Fatimid Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London 1998.

6 Jochen A. SOKOLY, *Between Life and Death: The Funerary Context of Tiraz Textiles*, in: Karel OTAVSKY (ed.), *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme* (Riggisberger Berichte 5), Bern 1997, pp. 71–78.

7 Moshe GIL, *References to Silk in Geniza Documents of the Eleventh Century A.D.*, in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61 (2002), pp. 31–38.

8 Ghada al-Hijawi AL-QADDUMI (ed. and trans.), *Book of Gifts and Rarities* (*Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa-l-Tuḥaf*): *Selections Compiled in the Fifteenth Century from an Eleventh-Century Manuscript of Gifts and Treasures*, Cambridge MA 1996.

his work on the topography of Cairo.⁹ Al-Qalqashandī, on the other hand, describes Fatimid ceremonies in his discussion of the organisation of the Fatimid state.¹⁰ Both authors wrote almost three centuries after the fall of the Fatimid caliphate, yet based their texts on older sources.¹¹ All these sources present a fascinating picture of the role of textiles in Fatimid society and ceremony.

Alongside these rather practical considerations, however, my choice of the particular comparison of Norman and Fatimid textiles is also conditioned by the parallel political circumstances of the two regimes. Before turning to the actual comparison of textile examples and assessing their functions, the first part of the comparison therefore proposes to clarify the political contexts of the production of courtly textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt.

1 Courtly Self-Representation and Public Inscriptions in Fatimid Egypt and Norman Sicily

There are parallels between Norman and Fatimid rule which make the comparison of Norman textile material with examples from Fatimid Egypt a particularly fruitful one. For example, the early Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz as well as Roger of Hauteville and his brother Robert Guiscard entered their dominions as conquerors before establishing their courts in Cairo and Palermo.¹² As a result, neither the Normans nor the Fatimids could draw on ancient dynastic roots to justify their authority, which, as I shall argue for the Norman context, had important repercussions for the artistic language promoted by their courts. A further parallel can be drawn in terms of the religious backgrounds to the Norman and Fatimid rules: both dynasties belonged to religious minorities in their own realms. The Fatimid caliphs were the heads of a particular strand of Shiite belief (Ismaili Shiism) and ruled over a population which mainly consisted of Christian Copts, Sunnite Muslims and Jews.¹³ The Normans were Christians

⁹ Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Description topographique et historique de l'Égypte*, trans. by Urbain BOURIANT (Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission archéologique française au Caire 17), Paris 1895.

¹⁰ Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Les Institutions des Fātimides en Égypte* (d'après l'édition égyptienne de 1913–1919), ed. by Marius CANARD, Algiers 1957.

¹¹ An introduction to the sources of these works is given in SANDERS (1994), p. 10. For additional sources on Fatimid ceremonies and administration, see Ayman Fu'AD SAYYID, *Lumières nouvelles sur quelques sources de l'histoire fatimide en Égypte*, in: *Annales Islamologiques* 13 (1977), pp. 1–41. See also CANARD (1952); Marius CANARD, *Le cérémonial fatimite et le cérémonial byzantin: Essai de comparaison*, in: *Byzantion* 21 (1951), pp. 355–420.

¹² Thierry BIANQUIS, *L'espace politique des Fatimides*, in: BARRUCAND (1999), pp. 21–28; METCALFE (2009), pp. 88–111.

¹³ See contributions to section VI 'Les communautés juives et chrétiennes dans l'Égypte fatimide', in: BARRUCAND (1999), pp. 549–626; Ayman Fu'AD SAYYID, *La capitale de l'Égypte jusqu'à l'époque*

who followed the Latin rite and ruled over a large Muslim population as well as Greek orthodox and Jewish communities.¹⁴

Because of this special position of the Normans and Fatimids as rulers, it is likely that propaganda and courtly self-representation would have played a particularly important role in both contexts. Paula Sanders has written about Fatimid courtly rituals in processions and ceremonies which unfolded across the topography of medieval Cairo and which contributed to projecting a specific image of the Fatimid rulers.¹⁵ This also applies to the use of public inscriptions issued by the court, a phenomenon whose political motivations in Fatimid Egypt have been the subject of several important studies by Irene Bierman.¹⁶ The Fatimid caliphs used a type of officially sponsored writing with an ideologically charged content that was intended to be seen by a large public. Such texts could relate to political power in several different ways: they could show where power resided; and they could also give an 'illusion of power' where effective political power no longer existed, or indeed stake claims to power where effective power still needed to be established.¹⁷ This political function of public inscriptions as a medium for caliphal propaganda is particularly important, given the political situation of the Fatimids as 'newcomers', and will serve as a background to the discussion of the Norman context.

Court-sponsored epigraphy, which I refer to as 'public' epigraphy, was a medium of artistic self-representation of the Fatimid and Norman rulers that is particularly relevant to contextualising the textile inscriptions.¹⁸ Given that the Arabic textile inscriptions of the Norman ceremonial garments were made at court and for the purpose of royal display, and that – as we shall see – inscribed Fatimid *ṭirāz* originated from

fatimide: al-Qahira et al-Fustat essai de reconstitution topographique, Beirut 1998, pp. 132–33; Jacob MANN, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs*, Oxford 1969.

¹⁴ On the evolution of the social composition of medieval Sicily, see METCALFE (2002), pp. 289–93.

¹⁵ SANDERS (1994).

¹⁶ Irene A. BIERMAN, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text*, Berkeley 1998; BIERMAN (1997); ead., *The Art of the Public Text: Medieval Islamic Rule*, in: Irving LAVIN (ed.) *World Art: Themes of Unity in Diversity* (Acts of the 26th International Congress of the History of Art, Washington DC), London 1989, pp. 283–90.

¹⁷ 'Writing as a sign of power related to power in variously inflected ways. The official sponsorship of writing, at times, indicated power where power existed. Equally clearly, the display of official writing could give the illusion of power to its sponsor, where effective power no longer existed, or no longer existed in the same way.' BIERMAN (1998), p. 10.

¹⁸ For a definition and examples of Arabic public inscriptions, see Yasser TABBAA, *The Transformation of Arabic Writing: Part 2, the Public Text*, in: *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994), pp. 119–47; Richard ET-TINGHAUSEN, *Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation*, in: Dickran KOUYMJIAN (ed.), *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honour of George C. Miles*, Beirut 1974, pp. 297–317; Max VAN BERCHEM, *Egypte: Matériaux pour un Corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum*, Paris 1903. Also see the thesaurus based on Max van Berchem's corpus of Arabic inscriptions available online: <http://www.maxvanberchem.org/en/thesaurus-depigraphie-islamique> (last accessed 08/2016)



Fig. 40: Mosque of al-Ḥākim, facade, early 11th c., Cairo.

state-controlled institutions, I shall take the courtly textile inscriptions to be ‘public inscriptions’ like the public monumental epigraphy.

Fatimid public inscriptions discussed by Bierman include those which were used to mark urban thresholds – for example the city gates – and major monuments, such as the al-Azhar mosque and mosque of al-Ḥākim (Fig. 40), and presumably also the Fatimid palace (no longer existing). The earliest and possibly most impressive surviving example illustrating the political use of public inscriptions in Fatimid Cairo can be seen from the example of the caliph al-Ḥākim’s mosque, built between 990 and 1013.¹⁹ The mosque’s monumental inscriptions can be divided into two groups: the public inscriptions on its outside, which have a text containing both religious quotations and political propaganda in favour of the Fatimid caliph; and the ‘secarian’ inscriptions on the inside, which would probably have been accessible only to the assembled worshippers (Fig. 41).²⁰ Bierman suggested that the prominent use

¹⁹ Jonathan BLOOM, *The Mosque of al-Ḥākim in Cairo*, in: *Muqarnas* 1 (1983), pp. 15–36.

²⁰ BIERMAN (1998), pp. 3–4.



Fig. 41: Mosque of al-Ḥākim, interior, early 11th c., Cairo.

of inscriptions inside the mosque of al-Ḥākim acquired a political note through its strong visual demarcation from previous officially sponsored ornamental styles in Cairo,²¹ but few monuments survive to verify this hypothesis. Moreover, the political message conveyed by the public inscriptions on the outside of the mosque would probably have been more easily understood. The mosque was located slightly to the north of the walls of the caliphal city al-Qāhira (Fig. 42), so that the exterior of the building could have been seen even by those who remained outside the walls and could not enter the caliphal city. The public for the inscriptions on the outside of

²¹ The use of these ornamental inscriptions in an otherwise plain architectural space contrasts with the earlier mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, for example, in which ornamental stucco friezes were used. Ibid., p. 4.

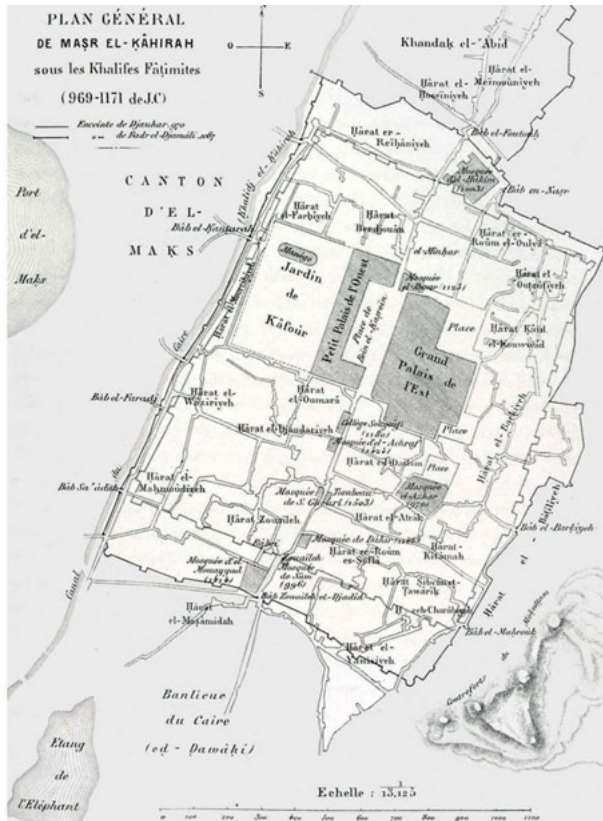


Fig. 42: Map of Fatimid Cairo, based on information provided by al-Maqrīzī (after P. Ravaissé 1889).

al-Ḥākim's mosque would thus have included both literate and illiterate viewers of different social and ethnic origins, as well as religious affiliations.²² Criticism that Bierman might have somewhat overstated the specificity of the Fatimid use of public writing relies on the observation that there are both classical and earlier Islamic precedents for such public inscriptions, for example from Aghlabid Ifriqiya.²³ Nevertheless, while justified, this point does not diminish the importance of the political function of such public inscriptions in the Fatimid period.

22 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

23 Jonathan BLOOM, Anna Contadini, *Fatimid Art in the Victoria and Albert Museum* and Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000), pp. 271–73.

2 Textile Production in Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt

The production of Fatimid *ṭirāz* was concentrated in three main geographical areas: the Nile Delta in Northern Egypt, with renowned textile centres such as Tinnīs,²⁴ Damietta and Alexandria; the Fayyūm region in Middle Egypt, south of Cairo, the Fatimid capital itself; and nearby Fustāt, referred to as Miṣr on the textiles.²⁵ Silk had to be imported and was not cultivated in any of these places. The centres of silk production in the medieval Mediterranean were few and mainly located on its eastern shores and in al-Andalus, with the exception of Gabes in Ifriqiya, Sicily and southern Italy.²⁶ However, all these Egyptian centres produced textiles of different materials and quality, some for the court and some for private patrons.²⁷ The Fatimid state spent large sums on *ṭirāz* textiles and their sale also constituted a major source of state revenue. The government department responsible for dealing with the state-controlled textile industry, the *dār al-ṭirāz*, thus occupied an important part of the Fatimid administration.²⁸

2.1 State *Ṭirāz* Institutions in Fatimid Egypt

In most studies on Fatimid *ṭirāz*, the products of the workshops are classified according to whether they were produced in a *ṭirāz al-khāṣṣa*, operating for the use of the caliph and court, or in a *ṭirāz al-ʿamma*, producing textiles for a larger public. This division into *khāṣṣa* and *ʿamma*, which is used to refer to both the products of the workshops and the workshops themselves, can be found in medieval written sources and in textile inscriptions. Nevertheless, the actual meaning of these terms with regards to workshop practice and the extent to which their functions can be held separate in practical terms has been the subject of some controversy.²⁹ In fact, the main difference between textiles produced for the court and those produced for private

²⁴ Yaacov LEV, Tinnīs: An Industrial Medieval Town, in: BARRUCAND (1999), pp. 83–96.

²⁵ Nancy MICKLEWRIGHT, Tiraz Fragments: Unanswered Questions about Medieval Islamic Textiles, in: Carol GARRETT FISHER (ed.), Brocade of the Pen: The Art of Islamic Writing (Michigan State University, Kresge Art Museum), Michigan 1991, p. 34.

²⁶ See Maurice LOMBARD, Les textiles dans le monde musulman du VII^e au XII^e siècle, Paris 1978, pp. 88–89.

²⁷ SERJEANT (1972), p. 142. Serjeant quotes from Nāṣir Khusraw's description of textiles produced in the workshops of Tinnīs and Damietta in which many different types of textile were woven, some for the exclusive use of the caliph, others for the open market.

²⁸ Yedida K. STILLMAN and Paula SANDERS, *Ṭirāz*, in: The Encyclopedia of Islam (second edition), vol. 10 (2000), pp. 534–38.

²⁹ For bibliographical references and a critical analysis of literature on both institutions, see SOKOLY (1997). On the types of institution and how they may relate to different patrons, see also CONTADINI (1998), pp. 39–58.

patrons in both types of workshops probably should be sought in the quality of these textiles, rather than exclusively in the institutional organisation of the workshops in which they were produced.³⁰ The analysis of both written sources and material evidence undertaken by Jochen Sokoly has shown that in certain cases the same workshop could have produced textiles both for the court and for a larger clientele, thus combining the functions of the *ṭirāz al-khāṣṣa* and the *ṭirāz al-‘amma*. So while the private *ṭirāz* worked only for the caliph and may have been the property of an institution under his direct control, the public *ṭirāz* did not necessarily follow this pattern.³¹

As Sokoly has shown, even the public *ṭirāz* (the *ṭirāz al-‘amma*) under the Fatimids was placed under the supervision of the caliphal textile administration, the *dār al-ṭirāz*. This would have added flexibility to the textile production, since the court could resort to ordering textiles from the public workshops whenever the private workshops were too busy. In contrast, when caliphal orders were scarce, the production could be oriented towards private commissions from outside the court environment.³² The conception of two antithetical types of textile workshop thus appears unable to account for the complex reality of Egyptian textile production.

In addition to the more general debates on *ṭirāz* institutions and particular information about the production of individual workshops under Fatimid rule,³³ the written sources also allow a closer look at other institutions connected with the *ṭirāz*, which would have been directly responsible for fashioning and storing the garments used by the caliphs and their court. This is particularly relevant in terms of the comparison with Norman Sicily. Al-Maqrizī’s *Khiṭāṭ* (*Kitāb al-mawā’iḍ wa-l-i’tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭāṭ wa-l-āthār*),³⁴ for example, a topographical book which contains a description of the main monuments and institutions of Cairo, draws on various primary sources from the Fatimid period and provides some insights into the textile topography of al-Qāhira. Apparently, several palaces inside the caliphal city were used as weaving workshops, including the palace of al-‘Azīz’s vizier Ya’qūb Ibn Killis (930–991), known as the *dār al-dībāj* (‘house of brocade’) until the twelfth century.³⁵ Another palace, the *manẓara*

³⁰ SOKOLY (1997), p. 116.

³¹ Sokoly specifically refers to the example of two Fatimid textiles kept in the Royal Ontario Museum Toronto which are very similar stylistically and technically. Yet one of them shows a generic inscription repeating *Allāh*, while the other one carries an inscription in the name of the caliph al-Ẓāhir. Sokoly concludes from this that some public workshops may also have taken commissions from the court. SOKOLY (1997), pp. 119–20.

³² SOKOLY (1997), p. 120.

³³ For example, in Alexandria: MARZOUK (1955).

³⁴ Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā’iḍ wa-l-i’tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭāṭ wa-l-āthār*, ed. by Muḥammad ZAYNHUM, Madiḥa AL-SHAQAWI, Cairo 1998.

³⁵ ‘It was in olden times known as the Street of the House of Brocade, because the mansion of the vizier Ya’qūb Ibn Killis, which today includes the Ṣāḥibiya School, the Darb al-Ḥarīrī (Street of the Silk Worker) and the Saifiya School, was made into an institution where brocade, and silk (ḥarīr) were woven for the requirements of the Fatimid caliphs, and which became known as the Dār al-Dībāj.’ To

al-ghazzāla on the banks of the Nile, is reported by al-Maqrīzī to have received large sums of money in the days of the vizier al-Afḍal (1066–1121).³⁶

In addition, the sources mention many other examples of institutions (*dār*) or stores (*khizāna*) related to the private caliphal *ṭirāz*. These include, for example, the tent stores, the stores of upholstery and furnishing, and the ‘wardrobe of robes’ (*khizānat al-kisawāt*).³⁷ This ‘wardrobe’ was reportedly founded by the first Fatimid ruler in Cairo, al-Mu‘izz, and contained the garments to be handed out to the courtiers twice a year, during a public ceremony inside the caliphal residence.³⁸ The upholstery store, on the other hand, is reported by Ibn Ṭuwair – also quoted in al-Maqrīzī – to have received regular visits by the caliph, who seems to have taken a personal interest in the production of this particular workshop:³⁹

‘Ibn Ṭuwair said: “The upholstery store is near the Bāb al-Malik. The caliph goes to it without sitting down there, but walks around, asks for information about the state of affairs there, and orders the work to be carried on.”’

That the Fatimid caliphs showed a certain interest in the correct functioning, but also in the products of the courtly *ṭirāz*, can also be derived from a passage in al-Maqrīzī:⁴⁰

‘When he [the *ṣāhib al-ṭirāz*] arrives with the royal requisitions (*al-isti‘mālāt al-khāṣṣa*), which include the umbrella (*miṣalla*), the *badla* (a kind of garment), the *badana* (a garment especially for the caliph) and the royal apparel for the Friday prayer (*al-libās al-khaṣṣ al-ḍjum‘ī*), he is greeted with great honour [...]. He stays at al-*Ghazzāla* on the banks of the river. [...] He comes before the caliph after bringing the chests (*ṣafaṭ*) which enclose the precious robes. All he has is displayed while he draws attention to one thing after another in the hands of the royal farrashes in the palace of the caliph, wherever the monarch happens to be in residence. Great honour is shown to this personage, especially when the materials ordered suit the requirements. When this is completed, it is compared with the account which he has with him, and they are delivered to the master of the robes.’

this, al-Maqrīzī adds that the street was known by this name until the late twelfth century. SERJEANT (1972), p. 151.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 151–52.

³⁷ For al-Maqrīzī’s description of the Fatimid wardrobe, see also CORNU (1993), p. 24.

³⁸ Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā’iḍ wa-l-i’tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭāt wa-l-āthār*, Cairo (Bulāq) 1853, p. 409; SERJEANT (1972), p. 157. ‘Ibn Abi Ṭaiy said: “He [al-Mu‘izz] founded an institution (*dār*) and called it Dār al-Kiswa, wherein all kinds of garments and cloth used to be cut. According to their various ranks, he used to invest the people with the summer and winter clothing (*kiswa*); their wives and children receiving the same. He made that a prescribed custom which they inherited in aftertimes from one another. He made out a register for this purpose and called the place *Khizānat al-Kiswa*.”’

³⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

Besides the fact that the caliph seems to have been involved in ordering and subsequently judging the textiles, the passage also suggests that the materials were rigidly controlled. In this case, the *ṣāhib*'s account, presumably listing the cost of materials and labour, is compared with the materials included in the chests. The administrative grip on the caliphal *ṭirāz* institution, and the close relationship between this and other caliphal institutions, can also be derived from an entry on the courtly *ṭirāz* in Ibn Mammāṭī's *Qawānīn al-Dawānīn*.⁴¹

'Now, if any sort of article is required to be manufactured, a list is made out by the Dīwān al-Khizāna ("the Office of the Wardrobe") and sent to them [the inspectors and overseers of the *ṭirāz*] along with the required (or computed) money, and gold-thread (*dhahab maghzūl*) for their expenses. When the chests (*ṣafaṭ*) are brought back, they are compared with the chits which went with them, and checked. If the value comes to more than has been spent on it, the excellent nature of the workmen is inferred from it [...]. If the value is less than the expenditure [...] the employees are required to pay it.'

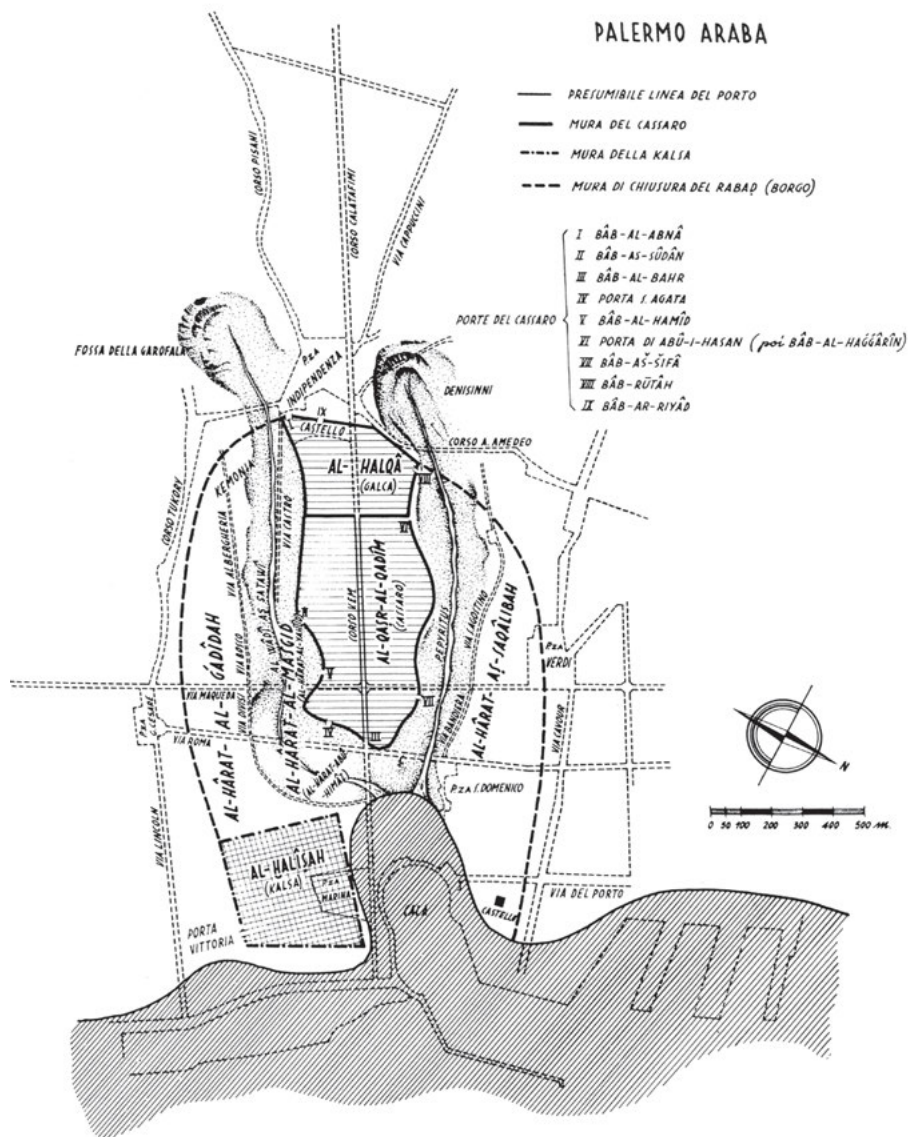
According to these sources, the courtly production of textiles appears to have been entirely dependant on the orders of the caliph and his entourage; the expenditure and the quality of the final products were tightly controlled. The textiles, which were thus closely tied to the state through the mechanisms of Fatimid administration, were highly prestigious and used to symbolise political hierarchies and social status. This is particularly evident from events such as the robing of deserving subjects during *khil'a* ceremonies,⁴² as well as the biannual distribution of garments and precious textiles to Fatimid courtiers, demonstrating the important function of these textiles in Fatimid politics, economy and ceremony. As I shall show, inscriptions on the textiles produced in the Fatimid *ṭirāz* institutions played a particularly important role in the representation of caliphal authority. The political function of textile inscriptions as public inscriptions on the Sicilian side, in contrast, derives from their placement on the 'public' ceremonial garments of the Norman and Hohenstaufen kings, rather than from an institutionalised production comparable to that of the Fatimid *ṭirāz*.

2.2 The Norman *Khizāna*

One of the major differences between Norman and Fatimid textile production is that there was no courtly institution in Norman Sicily comparable to that of the Fatimid *ṭirāz*. There are, nevertheless, some occurrences of the term *ṭirāz* in the written sources

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴² SANDERS (2003).



on Arabic and Norman Sicily. At the time of Ibn Ḥawqal's visit to the island in the late tenth century, for example, there appears to have been a *ṭirāz* market in Islamic Palermo (Fig. 43). According to this traveller, the *sūq al-ṭirāziyīn* ('market of the *ṭirāz* makers') was situated in the 'new quarter' of Palermo, where textiles of all sorts were

sold (with the possible exception of silks, which go unmentioned).⁴³ For the Norman period, on the other hand, the term occurs in two sources. A document from 1185 which lists the Muslim subjects in the district of Monreale mentions the son of a *ṭirāz* embroiderer.⁴⁴ And Ibn Jubayr, who visited Palermo in 1184, mentions *en-passant* that he encountered an Arab embroiderer who had been employed in the workshop of King William II.⁴⁵

'The handmaidens and concubines in his [William II's] palace are all Muslims. One of the strangest things told to us by this servant, Yahya Ibn Fityan, the Embroiderer, who embroidered [*ṭarāza*] in gold the King's clothes [Serjeant translates in the king's *ṭirāz*],⁴⁶ was that the Frankish Christian women who came to his palace became Muslims, converted by these handmaidens [...]'

This corresponds to what we know about textiles produced in the Norman workshops, which were indeed thickly embroidered with gold. However, despite these occurrences of the term *ṭirāz* in sources referring to medieval Sicily, in my view it is used here in its primary sense only, as referring to embroidery.⁴⁷ Only in the last example, the account of Ibn Jubayr, does the term refer also to the royal workshop. However, as we shall see from the evidence of the Norman textile inscriptions, there was no *ṭirāz* institution at William II's court, so it is likely that Ibn Jubayr's use of the term derives from his background and knowledge of the Arabic tradition.

In fact, if a courtly *ṭirāz* tradition had existed in medieval Arab and Norman Sicily too, it would be odd if not a single textile inscription claiming such a provenance were known and if there were no additional written sources mentioning a Sicilian courtly *ṭirāz*.⁴⁸ A comparison can be made with contemporary Ifriqiya. Although not a single piece of material evidence is known to document the presence of courtly *ṭirāz* workshops – the so-called '*Marwān*-silk', with its inscription referring to an Ifriqiyān *ṭirāz*, which will be discussed briefly with regard to the economic functions of textile inscriptions, is of a much earlier date – there are at least written sources which provide evidence for their existence.⁴⁹ Given the political situation of the island in the Islamic period, it is perhaps not so surprising that this particular institution was absent at the Islamic courts of Sicily. In the period in question, the Sicilian emirs, at first dependent on Aghlabid–Abbasid overlords, then on the Fatimid caliphs,⁵⁰

⁴³ Muḥammad Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*: Opus Geographicum, ed. by Johannes H. KRAMERS, (Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum 2) Beirut, Leipzig 1938–39, p. 119; SERJEANT (1972), p. 191.

⁴⁴ JACOBY (2006), p. 386.

⁴⁵ IBN JUBAYR (2003), p. 341.

⁴⁶ SERJEANT (1972), p. 192.

⁴⁷ Conf. above, note 2.

⁴⁸ JACOBY (2006), pp. 383–84.

⁴⁹ See SERJEANT (1972), p. 182.

⁵⁰ The most complete historical overview of Muslim Sicily is found in AMARI/NALLINO (1933–39).

showed no ambition to establish an independent political power. Since *ṭirāz* textiles were an instrument and clear symbol of political authority (and, more specifically, caliphal authority), this absence of aspiration might also relate to the absence of a courtly *ṭirāz* institution.⁵¹

The most revealing piece of evidence for the absence of such an institution at the Norman court, however, is given by the inscriptions on the mantle and alb, which – as we have seen – consistently refer to the place of their production not as *ṭirāz* but as *al-khizāna al-malakīya*. This Arabic term used to refer to the Norman royal workshops is a term which, as shown previously, also appears in the Fatimid context. *Khizāna* derives from the root *khazana* (reposit, keep, store, conceal)⁵² and is commonly translated as ‘state treasury’, or indeed library and document archive.⁵³ A *khizāna* in Fatimid Egypt was a store, sometimes combined with a workshop.⁵⁴ On the Norman side, this would correspond to Hugo Falcandus’ description of the Norman textile workshop, in which, besides the already mentioned enumeration of silk-types that were woven here, he also lists precious materials, such as silk, gold, pearls and gemstones, which were used to decorate the final products.⁵⁵ As Tronzo has suggested, it is likely that the textile workshop was inside the treasury in the Torre Pisana of the Norman palace of Palermo, or in close proximity to it (Fig. 44).⁵⁶ This would probably have been the most practical way to make the precious materials accessible to the craftsmen.⁵⁷ Such a location would also provide a further parallel with the Fatimid caliphal textile treasury (*khizānat al-kisawāt*), which was inside the palatial city.

So while the *khizāna* mentioned by the inscriptions of the mantle and alb may well be the place where they were produced, as well as being the place in which these precious textiles were then stored and possibly viewed, there is no evidence of the existence of a Norman textile institution comparable to the *ṭirāz* of the Fatimid caliphs. This is an important difference to keep in mind when we analyse possible

⁵¹ I would like to thank Alex Metcalfe for sharing his thoughts on this matter.

⁵² *Khizāna*, in: Arabic-English Lexicon, vol. 2 (1968), p. 734.

⁵³ *Khizāna*, in: Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart (second edition), vol. 1 (1956), p. 213. According to the work of Ibn al-Mammāti (d. 1209) on finance and administration in Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, the term *khāzin* was used for both state employees storing taxes in kind and those who kept inventories and archives of documents.

⁵⁴ An example of this is the *khizānat al-bunūd* (*khizāna* of flags or banners), which was founded by the caliph al-Zāhir (r. 1021–1036) and which seems to have been a place for both storage and production. See JOHNS (2006), p. 327.

⁵⁵ Conf. appendix.

⁵⁶ William TRONZO, The Norman Palace in Palermo as Display, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), p. 315.

⁵⁷ For examples of craftsmen being employed in treasuries, see Matthias HARDT, Gold und Herrschaft: Die Schätze europäischer Könige und Fürsten im ersten Jahrtausend, Berlin 2004, p. 225. For evidence of textiles being ornamented in caliphal treasuries, see Shelomoh Dov GORTEIN, Daily Life: A Mediterranean Society, Berkeley 1983, vol. 4, pp. 161–62.

Kufic inscription.⁵⁹ Other than the Fatimid textile preserved in Apt, also known as the '*suaire de Sainte Anne*' (Fig. 45), the textile from Cadouin lacks a central band with inscribed medallions and figurative imagery, and no gold thread was used in its production.⁶⁰ Yet both textiles are stylistically related and appear to have been produced in the Nile Delta, a region famous for its high-quality fabrics, which were much prized as diplomatic gifts at approximately the same period.⁶¹ Furthermore, the Apt and Cadouin textiles were likely produced in a courtly workshop. This can be deduced not only from their high technical and material quality, but also from their inscriptions, which mention the Fatimid caliph al-Musta'li (r. 1094–1101) and his vizier al-Afdal (1066–1121).⁶² We have no information about the original use of these garments and can only speculate about the circumstances in which they were brought to European church treasuries.⁶³ However, given their high quality and explicit relation to the court, they may well have been intended to serve as a *khil'a* (honorary garment) and thus had a distinct political function.

A group of textile fragments with similar medallions and woven with similar materials as the Apt textile has also been associated with a Fatimid courtly production.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ GERVERS/GOLOMBEK (1977), pp. 85–86.

⁶⁰ The Apt textile is also described in DELLUC/DELLUC (2001) and CORNU (1999).

⁶¹ LOMBARD (1978), p. 173. Thanks to its inscription, we know that the Apt textile was made in the private *ṭirāz* of Damietta in c. 1096–97. CORNU (1999), p. 333.

⁶² The inscription of the Cadouin textile, which clearly carries the markers of the Shiite formulary, was published in Maximilien DURAND, Florence SARAGOZA (eds), *Egypte la trame de l'Histoire: Textiles pharaoniques, coptes et islamiques* (Rouen, Musée départemental des antiquités, 2002–3; Paris, Institut du monde arabe, 2004), Paris 2002, cat. 182. The English version of the transcription given here is taken from Al-Qantara Mediterranean Heritage: http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=1113 (last accessed 08/2016). Line A: '(In the name of God) the Compassionate, the Merciful. There is no god but Allah alone, who has no equal. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. 'Ali is the Friend of God. May God bless them both as well as the people of their House, the pure imams (...).' Line B: '(...) Imam al-Musta'li billah, Prince of the Believers, may God bless him and his pure ancestors, his honourable descendants, the sword of Islam, defender of (the imam), guarantor for the Muslim judges, guide for the missionaries of the believers Abū-l-Qasim Shahanshāh al-Musta'li. May God strengthen the religion through him.' Line C: '(In the name of God), the Compassionate, the Merciful. There is no god but Allah alone, who has no equal. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. 'Ali is the Friend of God. May God bless them both as well as the people of their House, the pure imams (...) the imam Ahmad Abū l-Qasim al-Musta'li billah, Prince of the Believers, may God bless him and his pure ancestors, his honourable descendants.' Line D: '(... which was ordered) to be done by the illustrious Lord al-Afdal, the amir of the army (...) al-Musta'li (...), the sword of Islam, defender of the imam, guarantor for the Muslim judges, guide for the missionaries of the believers Abū-l-Qasim Shāhanshāh al-Musta'li (...). May God strengthen the religion through him.'

⁶³ Brigitte and Gilles Delluc suggest that the Apt textile may have been a gift, rather than having been acquired as booty during the First Crusade. DELLUC/DELLUC (2001), p. 617. On textile diplomatic gifts: MUTHESIUS (1992).

⁶⁴ Gervers/Golombek (1977), pp. 85–86. These fragments include the following examples:

– Cleveland Museum, tapestry woven medallion, silk and gold, late 11th c., inv. 50.541.



Fig. 45: Fatimid textile, 11th c., detail, Cathedral Treasury of Apt.

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- Cleveland Museum, tapestry woven medallion, silk and gold, early 12th c., inv. 52.255.
 - Cleveland Museum, tapestry woven medallion, silk and gold, inv. 46.258.
 - Geneva, Coll. Bouvier, gold woven tapestry fragments, cat. 134, 135, 148 (136?).
 - London, V&A, silk and linen, medallion with birds, 11th–12th c., Acc. 128–1869.
 - London, V&A, silk and gold, fragment with inscriptions, 11th–12th c., Acc. 707–1898.
 - New York, private collection of Mrs. A. Abemayor.
 - New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, early 12th c., Acc. no. 29.136.44.
 - New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. no. 32.96.
 - New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. no. 1974.113.14a.
 - New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. no. 1974.113.14b.

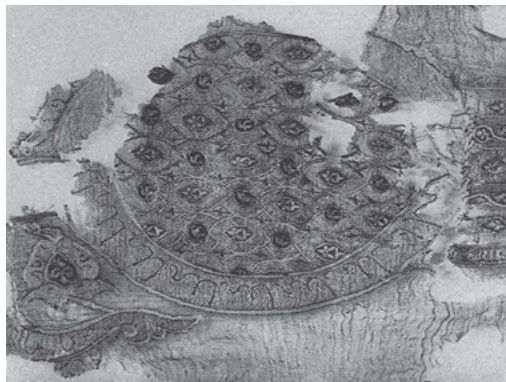


Fig. 46: Woven medallion, Fatimid, 12th c., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Inv. n. 29.136.44.

These fragments are thought likely to have originally belonged to garments defined as caliphal *‘abā’* (an overgarment).⁶⁵ One of the fragments kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Acc. 29.136.44) has been dated to the twelfth century (Fig. 46), and is thus roughly contemporary with the Norman textiles.⁶⁶ As in the Apt textile, the ground fabric is made of linen gauze, decorated with an oval medallion which is tapestry-woven in yellow, red, dark blue and light blue silk, as well as gold thread. The overall decoration is very rich, with different types of ornament, including scrolls, palmettes, birds and pseudo-script. This last detail is particularly interesting in terms of the comparison with Sicily, because no pseudo-inscriptions on textiles are known from the Norman court. However, it is important to stress that there is no clear evidence that these court-related Fatimid textile fragments originally belonged to caliphal garments.

In fact, relatively little specific information about the garments of the Fatimid caliphs can be gleaned from the surviving evidence, including written sources. While there are many literary descriptions of Fatimid caliphal processions and public ceremonies during which textiles were prominently displayed, most descriptions focus on the quantity of textiles, their overall impression, the quality of craftsmanship and their material value.⁶⁷ To mention but a few examples, the sources concur in stating that the Fatimids wore white as a sign of demarcation from the Abbasid caliphs, who had chosen black as their dynastic colour.⁶⁸ Moreover, according to the sources,

– New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27.170.6.

– The Textile Museum, Washington, 73.367, 73.228, 73.229, 73.79 and 73.164.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁶ Maurice S. DIMAND, Special Exhibition of Coptic and Egypto-Arabic Textiles, in: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 5 (1930), p. 129, fig. 5.

⁶⁷ See examples in SANDERS (2003), pp. 230–33. On Mamluk garments, on the other hand, see Leo Ary MAYER, Mamluk Costume: A Survey, Geneva 1952.

⁶⁸ SANDERS (2003), p. 230.

Fatimid caliphs wore extremely costly garments, with the exception of al-Ḥākim, whose eccentric puritanism attracted some attention.⁶⁹ Al-ʿAzīz (r. 975–996), for example, is reported to have owned a turban of very fine cloth about fifty metres long and with designs woven in gold.⁷⁰ The value of the gold alone was known to have been the equivalent of five hundred dinars, and together with the silk and linen, and the cost of production, the turban was worth about four thousand dinars. The *badana*, on the other hand, a type of tunic worn specifically by the Fatimid caliphs and produced in Tinnīs, is reported to have been worth one thousand dinars; apparently, this type of garment was woven almost exclusively with gold thread.⁷¹

Some of the fabrics produced in the Nile Delta – probably including gold fabrics, *qaṣab* (tapestry-woven with silk and gold) and *buqalamūn* (a shimmering cloth) – were restricted to the exclusive use of the caliphs; it was strictly forbidden to export them and the details of their production were kept secret.⁷² An anecdote told by the traveller Nāṣir-i Khusraw (1004–1088) confirms the exclusiveness of these textiles. He reports that a Persian delegation was sent to Tinnīs by the ruler of Fars with the sum of twenty thousand dinars to buy a garment from the *ṭirāz* made in the same fabric that the Fatimid caliph would use. According to the author, the envoys spent several years in Tinnīs, but their efforts were to no avail.⁷³

Al-Maqrīzī's description of the Fatimid *khazā'in al-farsh wa al-amti'a* (stores of upholstery and furnishings) at the time of al-Mustanṣir's reign provides further insight into the splendour of the thousands of caliphal textiles to which the Norman pieces could also have been compared, had they not been lost:⁷⁴

'The emir Abu l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan, one of the chiefs of the tentmakers in al-Kaṣr told me that the farrashes (porters) entered one of the stores of upholstery, when al-Māraḳī's demands of money from al-Mustanṣir were very pressing, namely the *Khizānat al-Rufūf* ('shelves'),⁷⁵ so named on account of the quantity of shelves (*raff*) in it. Each shelf had a separate ladder, and they brought down two thousands packages, consisting of pieces of gold brocade (*ṭamīm*) of all kinds of *Khusrawanī* (royal) material, etc., with their fringes, which had never been used. All of them were embroidered in gold (*mudḥahhab*) worked with all kinds of figures (*ashkāl*) and images (*ṣūra*) [...].'

According to the written sources, the caliphal garments and textiles kept in the Fatimid treasury must have been exceptionally valuable and sumptuous, but none

⁶⁹ BIERMAN (1997), p. 109.

⁷⁰ LOMBARD (1978), p. 177.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 173.

⁷² Ibid., p. 173.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 173.

⁷⁴ MAQRIZI (1895), vol. 1, p. 416. SERJEANT (1972), p. 159.

⁷⁵ This refers to a period of major financial crisis in the 1060s, during which the caliphal treasuries were opened and their contents looted and sold.

of the surviving textile fragments from the Fatimid period can be precisely related to these descriptions. Which of the many Fatimid textiles may have belonged to the personal wardrobe of the caliph thus remains a matter of speculation that can be based only on an appreciation of their material quality and value.

Given the state of the evidence, the comparison between Norman and Fatimid material faces the major methodological difficulty of having to deal with great disparities in both the quantity of the sources and often also in the quality of the objects. In many ways, the evidence on the Fatimid *ṭirāz* is diametrically opposed to that for Norman Sicily. On the one hand, the surviving or documented pieces from Norman Sicily are of the highest artistic and material quality and were made for, and used at, the Norman court. On the other, the majority of remaining Fatimid *ṭirāz* consist of linen ground-fabrics whose inscriptions in tapestry-weave are not even always woven with silk. Other fabrics which, like the Norman ones, were expressly intended for the use of the Fatimid court and kept in the caliphal stores are known only from written sources. According to the descriptions, which mention their rich materials and thick gold embroideries, however, these appear to have been the Fatimid equivalents of the class of Norman garments represented by the examples of the precious Sicilian alb and mantle.

The written sources suggest many parallels between the wardrobe of the Fatimid caliphs and the Sicilian royal garments, especially in the prominent use of gold embroidery. Rather than attempting to compare the Sicilian material with the remnants of written sources on the Fatimid caliphal garments, however, a better approach has been to look at material sources, specifically the inscribed Fatimid *ṭirāz*. Although these *ṭirāz* belong to another textile category – they are mostly made from more modest materials than those used in the production of the royal garments – they were the output of a closely controlled court production and thus provide an opportunity to clarify the phenomenon of Sicilian Arabic textile inscriptions. Despite the methodological challenge of the disparity of sources, the comparison of inscribed textiles as public inscriptions in the Fatimid and Norman contexts helps us understand the Norman use of textile inscriptions. However, it is important to stress that the following comparison between Fatimid and Norman examples is meant to elucidate the phenomenon of textile inscriptions on the Norman side only. The comparison will consistently take as its starting point themes relevant to the Norman material, in full awareness of the fact that it will not necessarily do justice to the complexity of the Fatimid side.

3 The Textile Evidence: Styles and Contents of Textile Inscriptions in Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt

To gain a better understanding of the position of Norman textile inscriptions in Arabic court culture, and more specifically of their relation to the inscribed *ṭirāz* of Fatimid Egypt, one important element to consider is style. A general evolution towards increasing complexity has been noted in the stylistic evolution of Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscriptions,

which develop from simple lines of Kufic towards decorative cursive scripts integrated into the overall ornamental scheme of the fabrics.⁷⁶ Of course, the present focus on inscriptions presupposes an artificial selection of one ornament over others in an attempt to identify the stylistic evolution of Fatimid textiles. However, the general trend towards ornamentalisation appears to be verifiable also for other ornamental motifs, whose importance in relation to the plain textile grounds increases throughout the Fatimid period.⁷⁷

The content of Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscriptions varies just as much as their styles; they range from factory marks to good wishes and blessings, and from legal formulae to Qur'ānic verses.⁷⁸ Written sources also contain evidence of inscriptions which elucidate the iconography of textiles, for example in the case of a map kept in the Fatimid treasury, or of portraits of previous caliphs and rulers.⁷⁹ Moreover, if we extend the brief overview of contents to the broader Islamic context, there is also written evidence of 'speaking' textiles, a *mandil* (kerchief), for instance, with inscriptions in the first person.⁸⁰ It is very likely, as Nancy Micklewright has suggested, that the contents of textile inscriptions were adapted to the functions of the textiles and garments. An inscription on a *mandil*, for example, would have been seen and read very differently to an inscription on a turban or a cloak. Aspects such as the size and content of an inscription could be much better understood if we knew the original function of the textile to which they belonged.

76 MARZOUK (1943).

77 On the parallel evolution of inscriptions, patterns and overall decoration toward increased ornamental complexity, see Sheila BLAIR, *Islamic Inscriptions*, Edinburgh 1998, pp. 166–67. See also Archibald H. CHRISTIE, *The Development of Ornament from Arabic Script* (to be continued), in: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 40 (1922), pp. 287–92; and id., *The Development of Ornament from Arabic Script - II*, in: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 41 (1922), pp. 34–41.

78 BLAIR (1998), pp. 164–81.

79 An extraordinary textile map with captions for the landmarks and geographical areas was commissioned by al-Mu'izz in Ifriqiya (quotation from al-Maqrīzī's *Kitāb Itti'āz*): 'ein Stück blauer qurqubi Seide aus Tustar von aussergewöhnlicher Machart, mit Gold und verschiedenen Seiden gewebt. Al Mu'izz li Din Allah hatte es im Jahre 353 (964) herstellen lassen. Darauf waren die Zonen der Erde, ihre Berge und Meere, Städte, Flüsse und Routen, quasi eine Geographie, abgebildet. Auch eine Abbildung von Mekka und Medina, wie sie sich dem Zuschauer darbieten, war darauf, und jede Stadt und jeder Berg, alle Orte, Flüsse, Meere und Wege waren mit ihrem Namen in Gold, Silber, oder Seide beschriftet, und am Ende stand: zu dem gehörig, was al-Mu'izz li Din Allah hat machen lassen aus Sehnsucht nach dem Heiltum Gottes, im Jahr 352. Die Kosten haben 22.000 Dinar betragen.' OESTERLE (2009), p. 252.

80 Avinoam SHALEM, *If Objects Could Speak*, in: Jürgen W. FREMBGEN (ed.), *The Aura of the Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam* (Munich, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, 2010–11), Munich 2010, pp. 127–47; FRANZ ROSENTHAL, *A Note on the Mandil*, in: Richard ETTINGHAUSEN and Otto KURZ, *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam*, Leiden 1971, pp. 63–99; Mario BURZACECHI, *Oggetti parlanti nelle epigrafi greche*, in: *Epigraphica* 24 (1962), pp. 3–54.



Fig. 47: Textile inscription in the 'first style', Fatimid, late 10th c. (?), Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 8264.

This is an aspect of inscribed textiles which scholars have addressed with reference to the Norman material, but which has not yet been considered for the Fatimid *ṭirāz*.⁸¹

3.1 Styles of Textile Inscriptions

Focusing exclusively on textile inscriptions, Mohammad Abdil Aziz Marzouk has proposed dividing the evolution of Fatimid *ṭirāz* styles into four periods.⁸² The first period he identifies is a transitional one during which the Fatimid style is slowly consolidated and linked with the Egyptian reigns of the caliphs al-Mu'izz, al-'Aziz and al-Ḥākim, between 969 and 1021. Marzouk describes the letters of this period as relatively plain, but some of them, such as the *'ayn* and *nūn*, can be elongated or given simple floral terminals. Towards the end of this period of stylistic development,

⁸¹ Nancy Micklewright deplores the fact that research on *ṭirāz*, so far, has largely ignored the question of the original function of the textiles from which the decorated parts have been published and studied. She points out that reconstructing the garments using analyses of seams, for example, would be a necessary step forward in the study of *ṭirāz*. MICKLEWRIGHT (1991).

⁸² MARZOUK (1955). See also Muhammad ABBAS SELIM, The Inscriptions on Islamic Fabrics in the Abegg Foundation, in: Karel OTAVSKY (ed.), *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme* (Riggisberger Berichte 5), Bern 1997, pp. 123–28; BIERMAN (1997); Sheila BLAIR, Inscriptions on Medieval Islamic Textiles, in: Karel OTAVSKY (ed.), *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme* (Riggisberger Berichte 5), Bern 1997, pp. 95–104.

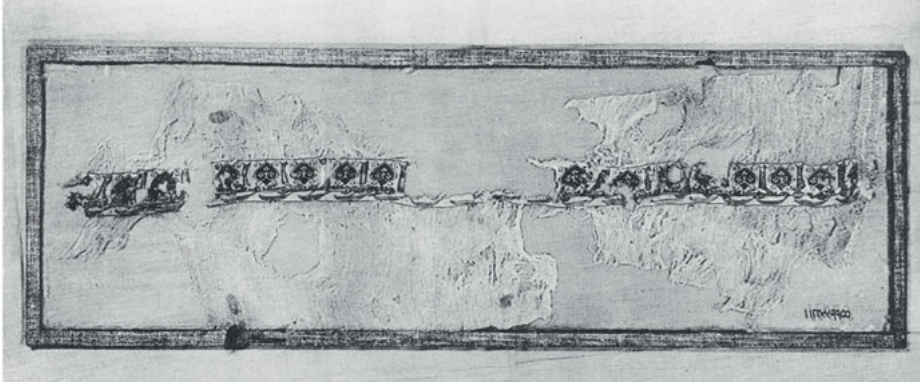


Fig. 48: Textile inscription in the ‘second style’, Fatimid, second half 11th c., Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 12395.

vegetal scrolls begin to fill the interspaces between the letters.⁸³ A *qirāz* fragment with the name of al-Ḥākim (Fig. 47), for example, bears such an inscription.⁸⁴

Marzouk associates the second period with the reigns of al-Ẓāhir and al-Mustanṣir (1021–1094). It is characterised by a shortening of the inscriptions and the introduction of non-historical texts repeating one single word, or a phrase, such as *baraka* or *al-yumn*.⁸⁵ The amount of floral decoration on the letter forms increases, bows are added underneath the writing lines to regularise and formally unify the script (Fig. 48),⁸⁶ and the *lamalif* shape – also encountered prominently on Roger II’s mantle – is used as an ornamental element.⁸⁷ Inscriptions of the second period are often decorative, well proportioned and frequently symmetrical, but can also be misspelled and indecipherable. Moreover, Marzouk notes that while all previous inscriptions were based on the Kufic form of script, it is at the end of this second period, in the late eleventh century, that the cursive Naskhi script is introduced on Fatimid textiles.

The third period of Fatimid *qirāz* styles is very short: it is associated with the reigns of al-Musta’lī and al-Āmir (1094–1130). It fits with the previously described evolution through insertions of letter forms for decorative purposes and the increasing popular-

⁸³ Sheila BLAIR, *Floriated Cufic and the Fatimids*, in: BARRUCAND (1999), pp. 107–16. See also Adolf GROHMANN, *The Origin and Early Development of Floriated Kufic*, in: *Ars Orientalis* (1957), pp. 183–214.

⁸⁴ Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 8264. MARZOUK (1955), p. 165, fig. 7.

⁸⁵ BLAIR (1997), p. 98.

⁸⁶ Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 12395. MARZOUK (1955), p. 165, fig. 8.

⁸⁷ ‘Fearing that the succession of vertical lines might become too tiresome to the eye, (the weaver) tried to lighten them sometimes by twisting the stems of the *alif* and *lām* together.’ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

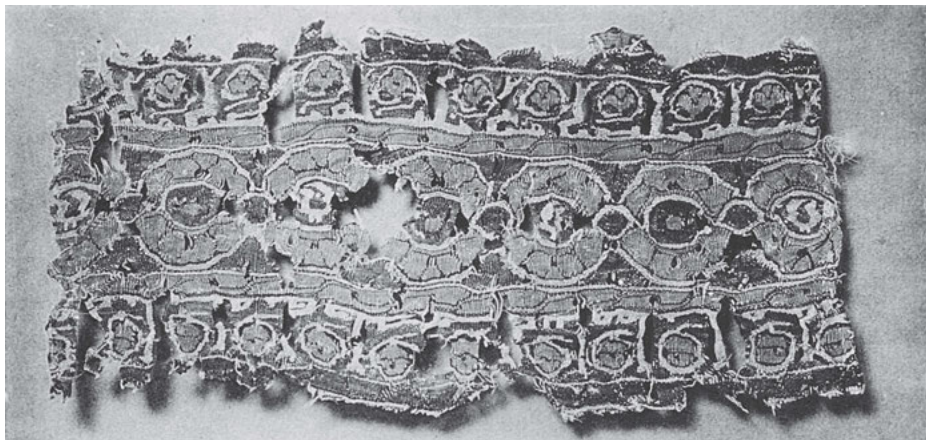


Fig. 49: Textile inscription in the ‘third style’, Fatimid, late 11th c., Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 8040.

ity of Naskhi script (Fig. 49).⁸⁸ The last period, until 1171 (caliphs al-Ḥāfiẓ, al-Ẓāfir, al-Fā’iz and al-ʿĀqid) is marked by the appearance of ever wider and more elaborate decorative bands, which are often framed by inscriptions or pseudo-inscriptions (Fig. 50).⁸⁹

While the general trend towards the increasing ornamentalisation of Fatimid textile inscriptions can be broadly confirmed from the material evidence, it is not possible to impose a rigid classification on the Fatimid textile inscriptions. The great variety of Fatimid *ṭirāz* indicates that the designs and inscriptions would have been adapted to suit different fashions, functions and patrons. It would complement Marzouk’s hypothesis, for example, to investigate whether the ornamentalising trend and general evolution that he noted from legible to pseudo-script can be verified on both ‘private’ and ‘public’ textiles and to what extent the histories of the two types of textiles differ. One aspect deserving scholarly attention, for instance, is the impact of the looting of the Fatimid treasury in the 1060s by unpaid troops on the stylistic evolution of commercial Egyptian textiles.⁹⁰ Different styles coexisted at all times and legible inscriptions in both Kufic and Naskhi scripts continued to be produced throughout the Fatimid period, further complicating the thesis of a linear stylistic evolution.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 8040. Ibid., p. 166, fig. 13. This textile is similar to a textile kept in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, inv. n. 871375.

⁸⁹ Benaki Museum, Athens. Ibid., p. 166, fig. 14.

⁹⁰ The looting resulted in the sudden availability on the open market of large quantities of precious fabrics, which would certainly have been admired and copied. On the relationship between market availability and the stylistic development of textiles, see JACOBY (2004).

⁹¹ For example, CONTADINI (1998), p. 68, pl. 25.

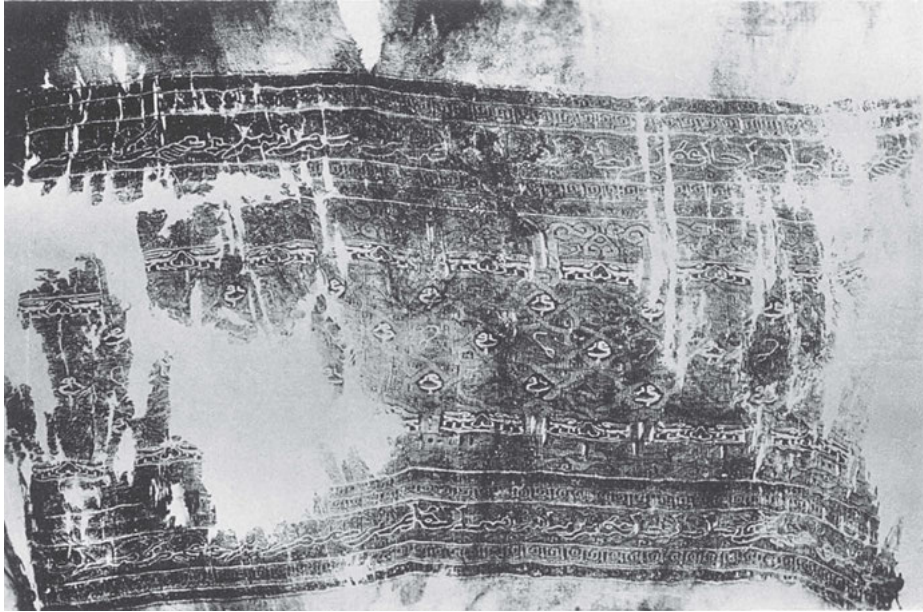


Fig. 50: Textile inscription in the 'fourth style', Fatimid, early 12th c., Benaki Museum, Athens.

Any conclusions arising from the comparison with Norman textiles thus ought to be drawn carefully.

Of course, the 'Fatimid style' came into being only gradually and out of a continuity with previous *ṭirāz* styles; it cannot be seen in isolation. A particularly revealing textile illustrating the gradual change was published by Ernst Kühnel and Louisa Bellinger.⁹² This textile fragment from the collection of the Textile Museum in Washington shows the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz, but accompanied by an Abbasid formula rather than the Shiite protocol, which is used on later Fatimid textiles.⁹³ It appears, therefore, that the new Fatimid government took over the pre-existing state *ṭirāz* workshops after the conquest of Egypt in 969. As the example shows, this take-over did not cause an abrupt change of content or style in the *ṭirāz* inscriptions. On the contrary, it is very probable that the same craftsmen continued to work in the factories. The names of the caliphs thus seem to have been the first element to be

⁹² The coexistence of different styles can also be derived from the overview of textiles provided in Louisa BELLINGER, Ernst KÜHNEL, *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics: Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid* (Textile Museum Washington), Washington 1952.

⁹³ Textile Museum, Washington DC, inv. no. 73.370. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

changed in the inscriptions before an identifiable Fatimid style to match the textile inscriptions was developed.⁹⁴

If we now turn to compare the broad overview of the Fatimid *ṭirāz* styles with the material from Norman Sicily, the most striking discordance between contemporary Fatimid *ṭirāz* and the Norman inscriptions appears to be with the mantle. When Roger II's mantle was embroidered in 1133/4, the style used for the inscription on its hem was very much out of fashion on Egyptian textiles. Unlike the Naskhi or floriated scripts in use on Fatimid *ṭirāz* textiles at the time, the clear ductus of the mantle's angular Kufic inscription is almost unornamented, with the exception of a few *lamalif* and *ʿayn* shapes. Since the mantle's inscription certainly cannot be related to the contemporary textile trends of Egypt, we may safely say that any thought of direct transfer ought to be discarded. As I show in Chapter 5, the reasons underlying the choice of such a comparatively obsolete style of writing on Roger II's mantle can be found in the political circumstances of Roger II's accession to the throne.

All other Arabic textile inscriptions from Norman Sicily, including those on the stockings, alb and funerary garments, on the other hand, are written in Naskhi and Thuluth scripts, reminiscent of the types also used during the later styles of the Fatimid *ṭirāz*. The inscribed textiles produced at the court of William II are thus more similar to the contemporary court fashion of Egypt and lack the archaising tendency of the Kufic inscription of Roger II's mantle. I have been unable to locate textile inscriptions from Egypt which might resemble those of the stockings. But there are two embroidered Ayyubid textiles from the late twelfth century which show stylistic similarities to the inscriptions on the Viennese alb and Frederick II's funerary alb. These linen bands are currently on display in the Textile Museum of Cairo (Fig. 51).⁹⁵ The inscriptions are embroidered in large cursive letters which have elongated shafts ending in thickened terminals. Some of the letters are superimposed, like those in the Sicilian examples, which are also embroidered, not woven. As with the funerary alb, moreover, the embroidered Ayyubid textiles show an alternating pattern of vegetal ornament and medallions, interspersed with inscribed fields. In contrast to Fatimid–Norman relations, relations between the Sicilian kings and the Ayyubid rulers of Egypt have received little scholarly attention. However, the stylistic resemblance between these textiles and those used at the Norman court hint at both political tension and artistic exchange in Norman–Ayyubid relations; this aspect certainly merits further study.⁹⁶

The stylistic comparison thus shows that a standard twelfth-century Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscription would have been stylistically very different from those on the Norman

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 54–56.

⁹⁵ Textile Museum Cairo, inv. n. 337 and 338.

⁹⁶ On the political tensions, see, for example, Hamilton R. GIBB, *The Rise of Saladin 1169–1189*, in: Kenneth M. SETTON and Marshall W. BALDWIN (eds), *A History of the Crusades*. Vol. I: *The First Hundred Years*, London 1969, pp. 562–89.

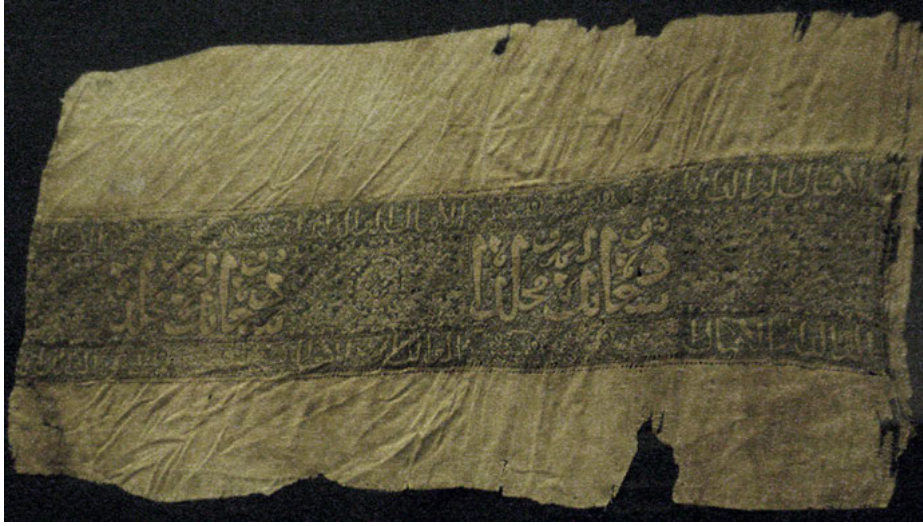


Fig. 51: Embroidered linen, Ayyubid, late 12th–13th c., Textile Museum, Cairo, inv. n. 338.

textiles. This is with the possible exception of those on the *alb*, however, which are more reminiscent of Ayyubid textile inscriptions than Fatimid ones. In fact, most Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscriptions from the ‘third’ and ‘fourth’ categories, contemporary with the Norman textiles, would have been heavily ornamented, with inscriptions that sometimes even included illegible pseudo-script. Given the scarcity of the Norman material, it would be impossible to ascertain if there was an evolution from Kufic to cursive and from legible to highly ornamentalised script, as has been suggested for the Fatimid material. However, we certainly know of no pseudo-inscriptions on textiles from the Norman court. Hence, although the use of Arabic textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily may partly reflect a shared court fashion, it is unlikely that these inscriptions were used purely for their formal effect. And it is equally improbable that Fatimid *ṭirāz* were used as direct models for the production of the Norman textile inscriptions.

3.2 Textual Contents

The most studied type of inscription known from Fatimid Egypt and most relevant to the comparison with the Sicilian textiles, however, is what can be called ‘historical’ inscription.⁹⁷ These generally begin with invocations to God and blessings, often

⁹⁷ GERVERS/GOLOMBEK (1977), p. 88.

referring also to Ali the cousin and son-in-law of Mohammad, from whom the Ismaili Fatimids claimed descent. Then blessings are pronounced on the reigning caliph, mentioned by name and titles according to the Shiite protocol. Textile inscriptions for the Fatimid caliphs would often have included phrases such as ‘people of the house’ (*ahl al-bayt*), or ‘his pure ancestors’ (*ābā’ihī al-ṭāhirīn*),⁹⁸ as well as attributing the title of imam to the caliphs they named. This is generally followed by the formulae *mimmā amara bi-‘amalihi* (from what he ordered to be made) or *mimmā ‘umila bi-* (from what was made in), before the type of the workshop is mentioned, together with its location and the date.⁹⁹

An example of this type of standard inscription is given by an eleventh-century Fatimid *ṭirāz* from the textile collection of the Royal Ontario Museum:¹⁰⁰

‘Bismillāh (in the name of God), the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no God but Allāh and his friend is ‘Alī Abū l-Ḥasan, the Imam al-Zāhir li-i‘zāz dīn Allāh, Commander of the Faithful, son of the Imam al-Ḥākim bi-amr-illāh, Commander of the Faithful. Allāh’s benedictions and His Mercy and His Blessings upon them both and their pure ancestors, the Imāms, the Guides, the Mahdīs. From what was ordered to be made in the public factory [*ṭirāz al-‘amma*] of Damietta, in the year 412.’

Although two of the Norman inscriptions, those on the mantle and alb, are clearly dated and might therefore be considered historical inscriptions, the Sicilian Arabic textile inscriptions are extremely varied and overall quite unlike the standard Fatimid *ṭirāz* formulae described above. As Grabar has pointed out, one of the most obvious elements missing from the Norman textile inscriptions are invocations to God.¹⁰¹

The inscriptions decipherable on the funerary garments of Frederick II and Henry VI are the only examples from the Sicilian garments that have standardised inscriptions of a type that can also be found on Fatimid textiles. In fact, the inscriptions consist of epithets praising the qualities of the ruler and offering good wishes (*al-yumn wa-l-iqbāl*) which resemble those on a textile previously kept in the Collection Bouvier in Geneva (Fig. 52).¹⁰² This small textile fragment of yellow linen fragment (13,5 × 14 cm) from the late Fatimid period, shows an ornamental band with

⁹⁸ BLAIR (1997), p. 98.

⁹⁹ For transcribed and translated examples of historical inscriptions, see BELLINGER/KÜHNEL (1952).

¹⁰⁰ Royal Ontario Museum, inv. n. 970.364.2, a–b. Veronika GERVERS (ed.), *Studies in Textile History in Memory of Harold B. Burnham*, Toronto 1977, cat. 14, p. 107.

¹⁰¹ GRABAR (2005), p. 40.

¹⁰² The textile is now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar. Formerly Collection Bouvier, Geneva, inv. JFB I 28. CORNU (1993), cat. 158, p. 259. As Gisela Helmecke has shown, a large number of textiles from the 11th and 12th c. with formulaic inscriptions of good wishes have been discovered during excavations at the Coptic cemetery of Naqlūn in the Fayyūm. Gisela HELMECKE, *Textiles with Arabic Inscriptions Excavated in Naqlun 1999–2003*, in: *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean Reports 16* (2004), pp. 195–202.



Fig. 52: *Ṭirāz*, Fatimid, 12th c., ‘*al-yumn wa al-iqbāl*’ (formerly Collection Bouvier, inv. JFB I 28).

stylised vegetal motifs woven in red silk. This is framed at its top and bottom by a repeated woven inscription, also executed in red silk. The inscriptions on the Sicilian stockings, on the other hand, are introduced by the phrase *bi-rasm al-malik* (for the king), which is not one of the standard phrases (see above) and seems uncommon for Fatimid textiles.¹⁰³

The Kufic inscription on Roger II’s mantle, instead, follows the scheme of inscribed *ṭirāz*, at least to an extent. It is introduced by the standard formula ‘*mimmā ‘umila bi-*’, and ends with a date, which is given in the Islamic calendar (528 AH/1133–4 AD). The main text of the inscription, however, presents a long verse of praise of the royal

¹⁰³ A parallel may be drawn with examples of inscribed metalwork from the Near East, in which the formula *bi-rasm al malik* was also employed, for example on an Artuqid bowl mentioned in the *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe*, ed. by Etienne COMBE, Jean SAUVAGET and Gaston WIET (Publications de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire 5), Paris 1934, n. 4962. The title *malik* also appears on metalwork from Mosul, for instance on the box made for Badr al-Dīn Lū’lū kept in the British Museum (Inv. n. 1878,1230.674). Introducing the multiple relations between Norman Sicily and the medieval Near East is beyond the scope of this study. Their importance has been discussed notably in: Nurith KENAN-KEDAR, *La Terrasanta*, in: Mario D’ONOFRIO (ed.), *La scultura d’età normanna tra Inghilterra e Terrasanta: Questioni storiografiche*, Bari 2001, pp. 225–52; Janine SOURDEL-THOMINE, *Le style des inscriptions arabo-siciliennes à l’époque des rois normands*, in: *Études d’orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, Paris 1962, pp. 307–15.

khizāna in rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), which is unique on textiles to my knowledge.¹⁰⁴ Its use on the royal mantle, however, suggests that there may have been an awareness at the Norman court of the status of *sajʿ* in the Arabic context and of its appropriateness to royal representation.

Some parallels can also be traced between inscribed Fatimid textiles and the textual content of the alb's bilingual inscription. For example, the inscription begins with the standard formula *mimmā amara bi-ʿamalihi*.¹⁰⁵ It then names the patron who commissioned the piece, 'the magnificent King William II', 'supporter of the Pope' and 'protector of the Christian faith', and gives a list of the territories under William II's rule. At the end, in accordance with the Arabic *ṭirāz* tradition, the alb's inscription names its place of production, 'his ever flourishing royal *khizāna*' ('*bi-khizānatihi al-maʿmūra bi-duwām al-ʿizz*'), and the date. So the structure of these inscriptions, as well as the formulations used for the factual details about the circumstances of the inscription's production, resemble those of contemporary Fatimid *ṭirāz*, such as the previously introduced textiles of Apt and Cadouin. Besides these structural parallels, there are striking parallels in the formulation of the titles of the Fatimid vizier al-Afḍal and those of King William II. They are referred to, respectively, as the 'defender of (the imam), guarantor for the Muslim judges', and as the 'supporter of the imam of Rome (the Pope), protector of the Christian faith'.¹⁰⁶

However, to my knowledge, there are no Fatimid textile parallels for the remainder of the alb's inscription, with its mention of the royal *khizāna* and Christian calendar date. Moreover, the fact that the inscription was planned in two languages – Latin and Arabic – again clearly underlines the differences between Norman and Fatimid artistic idioms, since multilingualism seemed to have had no function in Fatimid caliphal representation. There are, in fact, no known bilingual inscriptions from the Fatimid court. So although parallels can be noted between the Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscriptions and those on the royal garments from Norman Sicily, the Norman inscriptions clearly remain idiosyncratic and cannot be considered mere copies of pre-existing models circulating across the medieval Mediterranean.

3.3 Multilingual Textile Inscriptions

Even though in Fatimid Egypt, multilingualism was not a defining feature of the courtly visual idiom, bilingual textile inscriptions – in Coptic and Arabic, or indeed

¹⁰⁴ Al-Samman draws a textile parallel with an inscription from the early eleventh century (Textile Museum Washington n. 3116), but the resemblance is not obvious. AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 32, note 106.

¹⁰⁵ Conf. appendix.

¹⁰⁶ Johns remarks that the Normans chose Arabic titles which were appropriate to viziers and emirs, but certainly not equivalent to those of the contemporary Islamic caliphs. See JOHNS (2002), p. 273.



Fig. 53: Shawl with bilingual inscription, Fayyūm, 10th c. (?), wool and linen, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. n. E 25405.

in Greek and Coptic – could nevertheless be found on privately commissioned pieces. More specifically, bilingual inscriptions were produced and used in the Coptic Fayyūm region. Jacques van der Vliet’s article on inscribed Christian textiles from Egypt offers a complex appreciation of these bilingual Coptic textiles. Although his material is very limited – it consists of only a dozen or so textile examples – he convincingly argues that the Copts adopted the aesthetic of the *ṭirāz* in full awareness of its Islamic uses and functions, but transformed it in a way that expressed their belonging to a separate social group.¹⁰⁷

The article is particularly interesting for its consideration of the different functions of each of the languages juxtaposed. One of the textiles he discusses, a bilingual shawl kept in Paris (Musée du Louvre, inv. 25405), for instance, bears lengthy inscriptions in both Arabic and Coptic (Fig. 53).¹⁰⁸ The Coptic part consists of a personalised prayer and states that the shawl was made for the priest Raphael. It contains no other factual information except the names of its owner and his father. The content of the Arabic inscription, on the other hand, provides information about the workshop in which the textile was produced, together with a wish for prosperity, and includes no particular personal or religious references.¹⁰⁹ In fact, as van der Vliet has argued, it seems that the two languages correspond to different registers and fulfil

¹⁰⁷ VAN DER VLIET (2006), p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ This shawl has been dated to the early 10th c., but may well have been of a later manufacture. Maximilien DURAND, in: DURAND/SARAGOZA (2002), cat. 165.

¹⁰⁹ VAN DER VLIET (2006), p. 35.

different functions.¹¹⁰ The more factual Arabic inscription gives information useful in the economic valuation of the textile itself, whereas the factual information in the Coptic focuses on the owner or the intended wearer of the textile. So while the Arabic inscription could be widely recognised and would have inscribed the textile into both the fashion- and value-system established in Egyptian society after the Arabo-Muslim conquest, the Coptic part seems to have been addressed to a more restricted group in this society, defined on the textiles by its Christian religion, Coptic language and the form of its alphabet.¹¹¹

In purely visual terms, the formal juxtaposition of Latin and Arabic inscriptions on the alb's embroidered hem is also reminiscent of the linguistic division and peculiar multicultural character of Norman Sicilian society. In fact, as the following chapter shows, the same display of the different languages' idiosyncrasy of forms can also be observed in other instances of multilingual public writing originating from the court. These include epigraphy and the documents issued in Latin, Arabic and Greek by the Norman chancery. The important difference though between Fatimid and Norman practice in the case of bilingual textile inscriptions remains that the alb was produced at court, not for a private patron. Consequently, the presence of a bilingual inscription on William II's alb cannot be explained with reference to a 'shared court culture' or to the adoption of a caliphal tradition, but is clearly indicative of a specific choice underlying the royal image propagated by the Norman court.

Although, in contrast to the Coptic textile, the content of the Latin and Arabic inscriptions on the alb does not obviously serve different functions, it is nevertheless different enough to suggest that the inscriptions may have been devised with different viewers in mind. Both inscriptions share a similar content, but neither of them is a mere translation of the other. Rather, the formulae used in the inscriptions to refer to the ruler and his dominion conform to the standards known from Norman Sicilian legal documents. In addition to the usual titles, however, the Arabic inscription also refers to the king as the protector of Christendom and the supporter of the Pope, thus emphasising a Christian identity, which was not explicitly rendered in the Latin. The alb's bilingual inscription addresses both Latin and Arabic speakers. In this aspect it resembles the bilingual Egyptian shawl. Nevertheless, rather than refer-

110 A similar observation was made by Renato Polacco on the different functions attributed to the two languages of a bilingual Greek and Latin inscription on the *Pala d'Oro*, from the high altar of the basilica of San Marco in Venice. According to Polacco, there is a clear hierarchy in favour of Greek (used in the 'celestial' sphere), while Latin seems to have expressed the wish of the patron. RENATO POLACCO, *Considerazioni sul bilinguismo greco-latino delle iscrizioni della pala d'oro di San Marco*, in: *Venezia Arti* 6 (1992), p. 23.

111 Bierman has remarked that a certain cultural 'boundedness' may be induced not only through language but also through an alphabet. BIERMAN (1998), p. 17. The example of the writing of Arabic language in Hebrew letters, for instance, demonstrates that an alphabet, as much as a language, may be used as a marker of social belonging. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

ring to two interrelated, yet separate social groups, which are distinguished – as on the shawl – through the attribution of different functions to the two languages, the alb's two inscriptions – different in form, but similar in content – appear to speak in a single voice.¹¹²

4 Functions of Textile Inscriptions in Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt

The functions of Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscriptions have attracted little attention, compared to their style and textual content. The same can be said of the study of ornament, of which the inscriptions form part, since ornament has most often been studied in terms of its style, not in terms of its function. However, asking about the function of written ornament prompts us to consider the intentions which may have fostered the creation of specific objects, as well as their subsequent reception.

The comparison in this section pinpoints some of many possible functions of textile inscriptions, which I have divided into two categories: textile inscriptions as conveyors of protection or blessing (*baraka*); and textile inscriptions as conveyors of status. Some of the functions presented here are more relevant to the Fatimid material than the Norman, and vice versa. But these categories are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, their overlaps contribute to underlining the great complexity of the functions of Arabic textile inscriptions.¹¹³ While the differences in the material scrutinised here reveal the choices underlying the Norman adaptation of Arabic textile inscriptions, the parallels highlight an awareness of the political function of textile inscriptions which would have guided the choice of this ornament in Norman Sicilian textile production.

4.1 Textile Inscriptions as Conveyors of Baraka

To introduce the protective function of Fatimid *ṭirāz* as the purveyors of *baraka*, I shall briefly discuss the association of the form of Arabic ornamental inscriptions with the

¹¹² The question of whether multilingual inscriptions in medieval Iberia may be seen as a conscious display of transcultural consensus has been addressed by Tom Nickson in his analysis of the quadrilingual funerary inscription of Ferdinand III of Castile in Seville: Tom NICKSON, Remembering Fernando. Multilingualism in Medieval Iberia, in: EASTMOND (2015), pp. 170–86.

¹¹³ A similar overlap of functions can be observed in gifts, including textile gifts, for example, which are representative of both material and symbolic capital. Anthony CUTLER, Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab and Related Economies, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers 55 (2001), pp. 247–78.

Qur'ān – often noted in the literature – and compare and contrast the practical uses of inscribed textiles in Fatimid and Sicilian funerary contexts.

4.1.1 The 'Aura' of Writing in Fatimid Egypt¹¹⁴

In Islam, the Qur'ān is considered the word of God, transmitted to the prophet Mohammad by the archangel Gabriel. The Qur'ān itself makes abundant reference to the act of writing,¹¹⁵ and inscriptions as such were imbued with sacredness.¹¹⁶ In the minds of Muslims, ornamental friezes with Qur'ānic content, such as those used in the Fatimid mosques of al-Azhar, al-Aqmar or al-Ḥākim (above), would probably have greatly enhanced the sacredness of the spaces.

Of course, it is unlikely that inscriptions running along the very top of the prayer hall in al-Ḥākim's mosque (Fig. 41), for example, would have been easily legible, but it may have been sufficient for a literate Muslim to decipher a few words in order to recognise the religious nature of an inscription and possibly even the precise verse. The same can probably be said about Fatimid textiles with religious inscriptions, such as the two curtains described by al-Qalqashandī, which were hung up on either side of the *miḥrāb* in al-Ḥākim's mosque on specific Fridays during Ramadan. The fact that they were inscribed 'with clear and accurate letters' in red silk quoting Qur'ānic verses may have been known, or possibly inferred from the context and some of the letter shapes, but these probably could not have been read across the distance of the prayer hall.¹¹⁷

A textile from the thirteenth century inscribed with the *sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ* (112) provides an example of what such textiles might have looked like (Fig. 54).¹¹⁸ This relatively small fragment (8 × 18.7 cm) shows three lines of tight cursive tapestry-woven letters repeating the same verse. The ensuing impression of regularity is reinforced by vegetal scrolls interspersed with the letters, which create a succession of roundels encircling the script. It is unlikely, given the size of the letters and the degree of their

¹¹⁴ The notion of aura, derived from Walter Benjamin, has recently been connected with Arabic inscriptions in an exhibition on the multifaceted nature of Islamic calligraphy, held in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich. Jürgen Wassim FREMBGEN (ed.), *The Aura of the Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam* (Munich, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, 2010–11), Munich 2010.

¹¹⁵ On the importance of the pen, for example: *sūrat al-qalam* (68), *sūrat al-'alaq* (96), *sūrat qāf* (50), *sūrat al-hāqqa* (69). See BLAIR (1998), p. 11.

¹¹⁶ For examples confirming the sacred connotations of Arabic writing in Islamic contexts, see Franz ROSENTHAL, *Significant Uses of Arabic Writing*, in: *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961), pp. 15–24.

¹¹⁷ 'Fī al-sitr al-ayman maktūb bi-raqm ḥarīr aḥmar sūrat al-fātiḥa wa-sūrat al-jum'a, wa-fī al-sitr al-aysar sūrat al-fātiḥa wa-sūrat al-munāfiqīn, kitāba wāḍiḥa maḍbūṭa.' The right curtain is inscribed with verses from the first and 62nd surah. On the left curtain there are verses from the first and 63rd surah, written clearly and accurately. Qalqachandī (1957), p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Paris, inv. n. 34328. DURAND, in: DURAND/SARAGOZA (2002), cat. 161, p. 196.



Fig. 54: Tapestry-woven fragment, 13th-c. Egypt (?), wool (?) and linen, Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Union centrale des Art décoratifs, Paris, inv. n. 34328.

inclusion into a seemingly repeated pattern, that more than a few words would have been read, if at all.

Referring to the degree of interlacing in inscriptions found on Yemeni ikat-dyed textiles, Sheila Blair has shown that religious inscriptions would often have been more ornamented than historical inscriptions and thus harder to decipher. Their ornamental quality, in turn, may have been used to enhance the sacredness of their content.¹¹⁹ In the same vein, Don Aanavi has argued that the ‘sacred aura’ of Arabic script, which would certainly have been attributed to Qur’ānic inscriptions (believed to symbolise the word of God), also extended beyond the textual content to encompass the very form of Arabic inscriptions.¹²⁰ The form itself was accorded a certain

119 Sheila BLAIR, *Legibility Versus Decoration in Islamic Epigraphy: The Case of Interlacing*, in: Irving LAVIN (ed.), *World Art: Themes of Unity in Diversity* (Acts of the 26th International Congress of the History of Art, Washington DC), London 1989, pp. 320–34. For a comparison with Byzantine material: Henry MAGUIRE, *Garments Pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in the Early Byzantine Period*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), pp. 215–24.

120 Aanavi makes this point in reference to Arabic pseudo-inscriptions. Arguing against the common assumption that Arabic pseudo-inscriptions should be considered signs of the ignorance of their designers, he mentions cases in which real and pseudo-script appear side by side on the same object, claiming that the form of script – whether pseudo or real – was endowed with sacred connotations and symbolism. Don AANAVI, *Islamic Pseudo-Inscriptions*, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University 1969. For a case study of the function of Arabic pseudo-script in a medieval Byzantine church, see Alicia



Fig. 55: Fragment of a tunic, 12th c., excavations at Naqlūn, tomb n. 165, inv. n. Nd. 00.083.

status: the religious inscriptions described above were legible in theory, but illegible in practice, and there was extensive use of pseudo-inscriptions too.¹²¹

But in Fatimid Egypt, Arabic was not the only type of script which may have been imbued with sacred connotations and attributed a protective function. In the Coptic Christian community, the use of inscriptions – and inscribed garments in particular – with a distinct apotropaic function is attested by an extract from the *Homily of St Michael the Archangel*, attributed to Timothy, Archbishop of Alexandria:¹²²

‘When you wish that the name of Michael shields you in every temptation, then you must write the name of Michael on the four corners of your house, at the inside as well as on the outside and also upon the edge of your garment in order that it will protect you against every evil that may rise up against you either hidden or manifest.’

From the Fatimid period, on the other hand, we have evidence of the funerary use of inscribed textiles in both Coptic and Arabic from the excavations of Naqlūn. The cemetery can be dated to the period of Fatimid and Ayyubid rule (i.e., up to the thirteenth century).¹²³ Also among the finds is a garment with Coptic pseudo-inscriptions from the tomb of an elderly man who seems to have been a priest (Fig. 55).¹²⁴ This woollen

WALKER, Pseudo-Arabic ‘Inscriptions’ and the Pilgrim’s Path at Hosios Loukas, in: EASTMOND (2015), pp. 99–123.

¹²¹ On pseudo-inscriptions, see DON AANAVI, Devotional Writing: ‘Pseudoinscriptions’ in Islamic Art, in: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 26/9 (1968), pp. 353–58. The function and status of Arabic script as an ornament deprived of linguistic content has also been addressed by ETTINGHAUSEN (1974); CHRISTIE (1922).

¹²² Quotation after a late-tenth-century manuscript. VAN DER VLIET (2006), pp. 29–30.

¹²³ HELMECKE (2004); Włodzimierz GODLEWSKI, Les textiles issus des fouilles récentes de Naqlūn, in: DURAND/SARAGOZA (2002), pp. 100–04.

¹²⁴ Tomb 165, inv. Nd. 00.083. GODLEWSKI (2002), p. 101, fig. 1.

tunic is decorated with vertical bands of crosses and Coptic pseudo-inscriptions, with one larger cross adorning the part of the garment which would have covered the wearer's breast. As we have seen with Arabic pseudo-script, the form of the letters alone may thus have evoked a certain function or meaning.

The fact that Arabic-inscribed textiles were also discovered in the Christian cemetery of Naqlūn strongly suggests that the form of Arabic inscriptions and their possible Islamic connotations do not seem to have been an obstacle to their use in Coptic religious contexts. Indeed, despite the use of Arabic ornamental inscriptions to enhance the sacredness of religious spaces in Fatimid Cairo, as we have seen with the example of the mosques and curtains, Arabic inscriptions were not necessarily seen as bearing Islamic connotations, even in a predominantly Islamic context. One example, also taken from the excavations of Naqlūn, is the shawl with an Arabic *ṭirāz* inscription, which was used to drape the head of an adult man.¹²⁵

4.1.2 Inscribed Funerary Textiles

The case of the cemetery at Naqlūn, in which inscribed *ṭirāz* textiles were used as shrouds, is by no means exceptional – many, if not most, of the surviving textiles from the Fatimid period were excavated in ancient cemeteries. As Jochen Sokoly argues, this second function of the Fatimid *ṭirāz* as funerary textiles may well have to be considered the result of an appreciation of these textiles as the bearers of status and an aura of sacredness, for there is no evidence that *ṭirāz* were expressly produced to serve in burials.¹²⁶ However, the extent to which the actual inscriptions on the textiles may have contributed to this special function of *ṭirāz* textiles is not easy to establish.

A correlation may have existed between the form of written ornament, as a marker of sacredness, and the association of *ṭirāz* textiles with the caliph; in fact, both these aspects of Arabic-inscribed *ṭirāz* could have contributed to an apotropaic use of *ṭirāz* as shrouds. For example, it was customary for high officials to ask for the special favour of being given a garment which had been worn by the caliph to use as their shroud (*thawb*).¹²⁷ Besides the fact that such a garment would have had a certain prestige, this desire to use the caliph's own garments probably relied on the belief that the Fatimid caliph's touch could convey a special *baraka*.¹²⁸ Objects which had belonged to the caliph were thus particularly prized. However, inscriptions would have been attributed a special status beyond the reverence for the caliphal textile as such. It seems, in fact, that in the Fatimid context, the very name of the imam-caliph was given particular importance. There is evidence of the particular veneration of the

¹²⁵ Tomb 174, inv. Nd. 00.073. GODLEWSKI (2002), p. 102, fig. 8.

¹²⁶ SOKOLY (1997).

¹²⁷ SANDERS (1994), p. 29.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 23–25.



Fig. 56: Fatimid burial, excavations at Fuṣṭāṭ, tomb n. 49.

ruler's name on legal documents, which appears to have been kissed by the *qāḍīs* to whom they were given.¹²⁹ Moreover, as we have seen with the example from Naqlūn, inscriptions on funerary textiles were often placed above the heads of the deceased.

Photographs documenting the excavations of Fatimid burials in the cemetery of Iṣṭabl 'Antar in Fuṣṭāṭ confirm this evidence.¹³⁰ The head of the body found in tomb 49 is covered by a large Kufic inscription which appears to run across the eyes and mouth of the deceased (Fig. 56). But this is not the only inscribed textile used here to wrap the body: Roland-Pierre Gayraud has identified this outer cotton and silk fabric as an Abbasid *ṭirāz* from Iraq. However, the innermost layer of fabric, which would have directly enveloped the body underneath two further layers of *ṭirāz*, bears an inscription in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz (932–972) and thus probably post-dates the outer *ṭirāz* (dated 932) by a few decades.¹³¹ This combination of *ṭirāz* from different periods and places shows the wide circulation of such textiles across political boundaries. The textiles were probably taken from the possessions of the man's

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 27–28 and p. 75.

¹³⁰ Roland-Pierre GAYRAUD et al., *Istabl Antar (Fostat) 1994, Rapport de Fouilles*, in: *Annales Islamologiques* 29 (1995), pp. 1–24 and p. 8, pl. 16–17. SOKOLY (1997), pp. 32–34.

¹³¹ GAYRAUD et al. (1997), p. 8. I am very grateful to Roland-Pierre Gayraud for his kind answers to my queries.

family, which suggests that he must have been wealthy enough to acquire such textiles, or indeed honourable enough to have been given them. In addition, it is possible that the reference to several caliphs may have been intended to increase the *baraka* of his shrouds through the layering of different textiles which could be considered as ‘relics’ of these caliphs.

For Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily, on the other hand, there is no evidence of the burial practices of the urban elites and aristocracy that is comparable to that from the excavated Fatimid cemeteries of Cairo. The use of inscribed textiles in medieval Sicilian burials is known exclusively from the eighteenth-century publication by Francesco Daniele documenting the textiles found in the royal sarcophagi of Palermo Cathedral.¹³² The material evidence from Fatimid Egypt and Norman Sicily is therefore once more divergent. One parallel which can be drawn though is that it is highly improbable in the Sicilian context that the textiles found in the sarcophagi were specially produced to serve as burial garments. Daniele’s drawings of textiles found in the sarcophagus of Roger II, for example, show a fragment closely related to the gold-woven fabrics used for the lining of Roger II’s mantle, which suggests that the burial textiles were not specifically made for that purpose, but also used in other contexts.¹³³ One important difference, on the other hand, is that in stark contrast to the evidence from Fatimid Egypt, textile inscriptions do not appear to have played a prominent role in the Sicilian burials. Only two funerary garments among the multitude described in Daniele carry inscriptions, an inscribed band from Henry VI’s crown and the cuffs of Frederick II’s alb. It would be difficult, therefore, to make the case that Arabic textile inscriptions had a particular role in the Norman funerary context. They may not have held any function beyond being ornaments on royal ceremonial garments.

The relic-like treasuring, however, which may have motivated the use of ancient textiles in the burial of the cemetery at Fustāṭ, is a phenomenon which can be equally observed in the case of the preserved Norman ceremonial garments. Ruth Grönwoldt, for example, has suggested that the gold-woven tapestries which form part of the lining of Roger II’s mantle may have been taken from a previous cope and then sewn into the mantle.¹³⁴ This cannot be verified since the gold-woven tapestries cannot be securely dated. The alb, on the other hand, provides another example of a garment made of textiles dating from different periods of Norman rule.¹³⁵ Seldom mentioned is that underlying the alb’s large embroidered breast-panel, a second one has been found. This ancient breast-panel, embroidered on purple silk, has been attributed to

¹³² DANIELE (1784).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pl. C.

¹³⁴ GRÖNWOLDT (1993), pp. 889–90.

¹³⁵ The hem carries the date 1181, while the arm-bands have been dated to the reign of William I. See AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 19.

the period of Roger II on stylistic grounds (Figs 27 and 103).¹³⁶ Since this piece would have remained invisible, it is possible that the textile was kept in the garment as a relic or amulet enriching the symbolical value of the garment and conveying *baraka*.

In consequence, the motivation for this reuse of ancient textiles goes beyond the practical fact that textiles of different periods were probably stored in the royal treasury and thus available when needed. In fact, I would suggest that the choice underlying their use on the Norman royal garments reaches well beyond the protective function outlined here and also supports a political goal.

4.2 Textile Inscriptions as Conveyors of Status

Given the great material and symbolical value of courtly textiles in Fatimid Egypt and Norman Sicily, they would, of course, have been perceived as conveyors of economic wealth, high social status and – in some cases – political power. But it is more difficult to ascertain whether the political and economic dimensions were shared by all precious textiles originating from the court, or whether inscriptions would have added to the value and political function of the textiles.

4.2.1 Economic Functions: Technical Notes and Factory Marks

Textiles, silken textiles especially, were important to the economy of the medieval Mediterranean.¹³⁷ In Paula Sanders' words, 'clothing constituted wealth in the economy of Fatimid Egypt, and expensive textiles were as good as gold at all levels of society, inside and outside the court.'¹³⁸ Yet the particular role of textile inscriptions in terms of the market values of textiles still awaits scholarly consideration. One element which can be observed in both Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt is that some textile inscriptions were used as technical notes and factory marks; I count these as contributing to an economic dimension of medieval textiles.

Textile inscriptions could function as markers authenticating the provenance of textiles. A standard Fatimid *ṭirāz* inscription would have identified the workshop in which it was made. Like a modern label, this may have increased the prestige of a fabric, depending on the renown of the workshop and its ties to the court. The styles of the factories of Alexandria, Tinnīs and Miṣr (Fuṣṭaṭ), which produced much-prized textiles on a large scale, can be easily identified because there are embroidered inscriptions on many of the fabrics.¹³⁹ These very simple embroidered lines of

¹³⁶ BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 68, p. 271.

¹³⁷ JACOBY (2004).

¹³⁸ SANDERS (1994), p. 30.

¹³⁹ GERVERS/GOLOMBEK (1977), p. 84.



Fig. 57: Marwān silk, 8th c., fragments, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. n. 1314–1888, 1385–1888.

script, added to the finished textiles in the very early periods of Islamic rule over Egypt, and unlike the more sophisticated *ṭirāz* inscriptions, can be considered factory marks. In one particular case, the so-called ‘Marwān-silk’ (Fig. 57), a seventh-century *ṭirāz* textile naming the ‘*ṭirāz* of Ifriqiya’,¹⁴⁰ the embroidered line of script appears to be more than a factory mark. Recent research has shown that the silk is most likely of Central Asian provenance.¹⁴¹ While the circumstances of its arrival in Ifriqiya are unclear, its inscription, added in Ifriqiya, may have to be considered a sign of the textile’s appropriation by a local workshop.

Various written sources from Fatimid Egypt, as well as the handwritten notes discovered in the sleeves of the Norman alb, point to the existence of a second type of textile inscription with an economic function. As we have seen in the first chapter, the notes provide valuable details on certain technical aspects of the production of the ornamental silk bands in which they were found. For example, by mentioning the names of the artisans involved, ‘Damyān’, ‘Ṭumās’, ‘Alī of Malta’, ‘Marzūq’ and ‘Muḥsin (?)’,¹⁴² the inscriptions reveal that – most probably – artisans of different faiths were active in the workshops of the Norman kings. In addition, they also provide a different type of information, associated with the economic value of the textiles. First, the notes document an authorship which may have had a certain value at the time – the artisan Marzūq, for example, may have been a well-known individ-

¹⁴⁰ It is the only known *ṭirāz* which can be associated with early Islamic Ifriqiya.

¹⁴¹ Ana CABRERA, Mina MORAITOU, Mariam ROSSER-OWEN, Fragments of the So-Called Marwan Tiraz, in: Helen C. EVANS and Brandie RATLIFF (eds), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition 7th–9th Century* (New York, Metropolitan Museum, March–July 2012), New Haven, London 2012, cat. 173, pp. 238–41.

¹⁴² AL-SAMMAN (1982), pp. 12–19.

ual. Secondly, it refers to specific quantities of precious materials, in dirham ('ninety dirham of pearls'),¹⁴³ which were used in the manufacture of the decorated silks.

For Fatimid Egypt, historical sources report a parallel phenomenon to this type of practical information on textiles. The accounts of the opening of the Fatimid treasury under al-Mustanşir suggest that some of the items in it may have carried notes on which their value was inscribed.¹⁴⁴ Given the organisation of the Fatimid caliphal workshops, this would not be astonishing. In fact, as we have seen, sources report that when the *diwān al-khizāna* ordered a textile, a request was sent to the *ṭirāz*, together with a certain amount of money and gold thread so that the workshop's expenses would be covered. When the finished articles were sent back, their value was carefully checked against the initial expenditure.¹⁴⁵ There seems to have been a precise awareness, therefore, of any courtly textile's value and of how this translated into specific amounts of gold and precious materials. And this knowledge appears to have been transmitted in writing. Another report, though from Islamic India, confirms that in some cases the value of the amount of gold thread used in the production of a robe, for example, was sewn into the garment as a label.¹⁴⁶ According to Stewart Gordon, this precision regarding the commodity value of garments would not only have expressed the Sultan's high appreciation of the individual and represented a locally recognisable sign of honour, but also contributed to reinforcing the economical value of such textiles as 'international currencies'.¹⁴⁷

4.2.2 Inscriptions as Textile Propaganda and Displays of Authority

At the Fatimid court, courtiers and individuals of particular merit were presented with textiles – possibly *ṭirāz* in the name of the ruler – on regular occasions during the year, as well as on specific occasions, for instance during *khil'a* ceremonies.¹⁴⁸ The example of al-Mu'izz's gift of gold-embroidered garments to Jawhar al-Šiqillī, who was instrumental in the conquest of Egypt, for instance, shows that textiles could

¹⁴³ Conf. appendix.

¹⁴⁴ SERJEANT (1972), p. 159, note 183. Referring to the splendid textile map manufactured in Ifriqiya for the caliph Al-Mu'izz, which is reported to have cost 22,000 dinars, Serjeant remarks: 'it is uncertain whether the indication of the price is part of the inscription, but how else could the *farrāsh* know it? Perhaps one may assume that a ticket was attached to each piece.'

¹⁴⁵ SERJEANT (1972), p. 151.

¹⁴⁶ Quotation from Ibn Battuta: 'He (the Sultan of Delhi) also ordered him to be given 50,000 dinars forthwith and placed on him a silk robe of honour, called *sūrat al shir*, which means "picture of a lion" because it had on its breast and its back the figure of a lion. Inside the robe there was sewn a tag showing the amount of gold used in the embroidering,' Stewart GORDON, Introduction: Ibn Battuta and a Region of Robing, in: id. (ed.), *Robes of Honour: Khil'at In Pre-Colonial and Colonial India*, Delhi 2003, p.8.

¹⁴⁷ On the role of silk as a currency: JACOBY (2004); CUTLER (2001), pp. 261–62; MUTHESIUS (1992).

¹⁴⁸ SANDERS (2003).

be used by the caliph as rewards.¹⁴⁹ Receiving such textiles, as we have seen, was a great honour and enriched the recipient. At the same time, such an endowment or investiture could also be used to reinforce political ties and allegiances between ruler and subject. While this applies to the textiles as such, in some of the sources from the early Fatimid period, hints can be detected as to the specific political connotation of textile inscriptions. Here it seems that the political function of inscriptions is closely related to the notion of caliphal 'propaganda'.

The political importance and high status of inscribed textiles in Fatimid Egypt is evident, for example from Yahyā al-Antāqī's description of the Fatimid conquest of Cairo under al-Mu'izz (932–975). Al-Antāqī describes in graphic terms the conquest of the city by the Fatimid troops, mentioning that banners (*bunūd*) inscribed with the name of al-Mu'izz were carried in procession, the effect enhanced by the voice of a herald.¹⁵⁰ In addition, missionaries, preaching and promoting Fatimid Shiism before the conquest, would also have made use of inscribed textiles, especially banners proclaiming the advent of a new Fatimid era.¹⁵¹ The visual presence of inscriptions thus also played an important part in the *da'wa*, the missionary work preceding the conquest and following in its immediate aftermath.

There are a number of particularly interesting *ṭirāz* which show the transition from Abbasid to Fatimid rule in Egypt and also illustrate the political propaganda function of inscribed textiles.¹⁵² One of them is a linen textile from a *ṭirāz* in Tinnīs which is inscribed with the name and Shiite titles of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz.¹⁵³ What makes this textile remarkable is its date, 355 AH/966 AD, which shows that this – and probably other textiles – were produced in Egypt and in circulation three years before the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969. Two other textiles of the Washington collection (one of which was mentioned earlier in this chapter), on the other hand, were produced in the very early years of the Fatimid reign and display the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz still accompanied by a typically Abbasid formula.¹⁵⁴

As Kühnel and Bellinger have convincingly argued, the early Fatimid *ṭirāz* textiles which used the same visual vocabulary as the Abbasid textiles, though with a different

¹⁴⁹ FU'AD SAYYID (1998), pp. 127–28.

¹⁵⁰ 'Il lunedì mattina la gente si svegliò in preda a terrore e sgomento. I motivi di orrore crebbero a dismisura, la città era tutto un saccheggio e molte persone furono massacrate. Il visir Abu al-Fadl Ibn Hinzabah inviò un gran numero di suoi servitori e uomini della guardia che batterono la città in lungo e in largo portando stendardi con su scritto il nome di al-Mu'izz al-Din Allah, preceduti da un araldo che proclamava l'aman per tutti,' Yahyā al-Antāqī, *Cronache dell'Egitto fatimide e dell'impero bizantino* (937–1033), ed. and trans. by Bartolomeo PIRONE, (Patrimonio culturale Arabo Cristiano 3), Milan 1998, p. 130.

¹⁵¹ FU'AD SAYYID (1998), p. 107.

¹⁵² BELLINGER/KÜHNEL (1952), pp. 54–55.

¹⁵³ Textile Museum, Washington, inv. n. 73.632. Ibid., pp. 54–55.

¹⁵⁴ Textile Museum Washington, inv. n. 73.666 and 73.370.

content, may be considered as signs of political propaganda before the conquest.¹⁵⁵ However, they have also remarked upon the continuity before and after the change of regime and pointed out that although the *ṭirāz* workshops had been taken over by the new rulers, the Fatimid protocol – including the caliph's Ismaili title of imam – had not yet been strictly imposed on all workshops, and the style changed only very gradually.¹⁵⁶ The material evidence suggests, therefore, that textile inscriptions were used as the symbols of the new regime, long before a recognisably Fatimid style was introduced to provide a visual identity to the newly conquered Fatimid territories. So at the beginning of Fatimid rule, before a more typically Fatimid style was developed, actually identifying a *ṭirāz* with the new Fatimid caliph was possible only if one could actually read the inscription and the caliph's name. Through their appearance, however, the textiles would have suggested continuity across political change.¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, this discourse of continuity also applies to the Fatimids' use of their founding father's regalia. Given that the Fatimids, just like the Normans, were a newly established dynasty, this is particularly relevant here. When al-Ẓāhir took over power from his mysteriously vanished father al-Ḥākim in 1021, he was officially invested first and then made an appearance in the palace courtyard on horseback, splendidly adorned with the crown (*tāj*) of al-Mu'izz.¹⁵⁸ Al-Maqrīzī clearly states that this first public showing of the new caliph was intended to confirm his lineage and authority.¹⁵⁹

The Norman garments too, in being used as the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire, were used to symbolise a type of political continuity enduring beyond changes of ruler. The regalia served the bearer of the title of Holy Roman Emperor: they served a position, therefore, rather than a person.¹⁶⁰ As shown in the introductory chapter, some of the regalia, moreover, such as Roger II's mantle, were attributed to the founding father of the Holy Roman Empire, Charlemagne. This denial of the twelfth-century Sicilian origin of the mantle would have further enhanced the discourse of continuity and political stability, while explicitly establishing a link between secular and sacred

¹⁵⁵ BELLINGER/KÜHNEL (1952), pp. 54–55.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ This use of inscribed textiles for propaganda purposes resembles the use of inscribed coins, which appear also to have been minted in Egypt before the Fatimids entered the country and founded their capital in 969. FU'AD SAYYID (1998), p. 107.

¹⁵⁸ OESTERLE (2009), p. 152. Paula Sanders specifies that the Fatimid *tāj* was not a real crown but rather a special type of turban that was wound in a distinctive fashion and by a particular servant. See SANDERS (1994), p. 25.

¹⁵⁹ OESTERLE (2009), p. 152.

¹⁶⁰ On the relationship between titles, political power and individuals in medieval law, see Thomas ERTL, Der Regierungsantritt Heinrichs VI. im Königreich Sizilien (1194): Gedanken zur zeremoniellen Bewältigung der *unio regni ad imperium*, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 37 (2003), pp. 259–89.

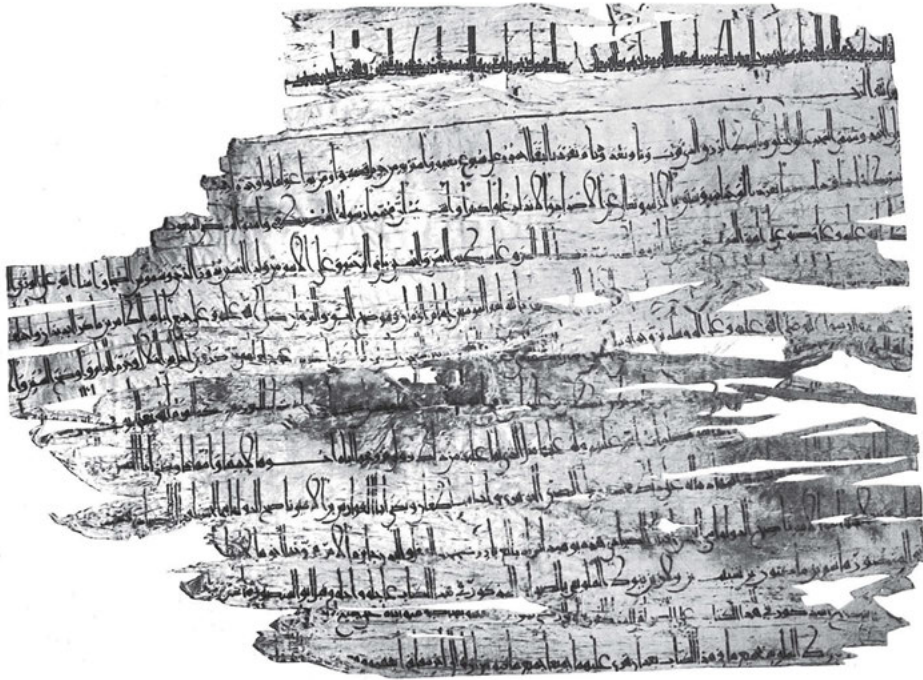


Fig. 58: Marriage contract embroidered on silk, c. 1036–94, 85 × 62 cm (originally c. 110 × 70 cm), Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. n. 9381.

rule within the Empire, since Charlemagne had been canonised in 1165.¹⁶¹ Ancient textiles known to have belonged to royal predecessors would certainly have been used and esteemed for their memorial value and protective function. In addition, however, I shall suggest that the particular choice of inscribed textiles may have been considered particularly relevant to the textiles' legitimising function.

4.2.3 Legal Functions of Textile Inscriptions

Another function of textile inscriptions which can be observed in the Fatimid and Norman courts is a legal one. A parallel can be drawn here between the Norman alb and a marriage contract embroidered on silk, which originated from the Fatimid court (Fig. 58).¹⁶² The contract dates from the reign of al-Mustansir (1036–1094). The

¹⁶¹ Charlemagne was canonised by the Antipope Paschal III. Although the Church never officially recognised this canonisation, a lively cult developed.

¹⁶² RAGHIB, Yusuf, Un contrat de mariage sur soie d'Egypte Fatimide, in: *Annales Islamologiques* 16 (1980), pp. 31–37.

large Fatimid silk document measures 85 × 62 cm, but would originally have been considerably larger (c. 110 × 70 cm, according to Yusuf Raghib). It is a rare example of a *muhrāq* textile, a type treated with a solution of gum and polished with shells to obtain a special sheen. The inscription is embroidered in black silk on a white ground. The introductory line is embroidered in a very ornamental Kufic style and consists of Qur'ānic verses. The remainder of the inscription presents the actual marriage contract; this, however, lacks a mention of the dowry and the witnesses' signatures, which may have been inscribed on the parts that are now lost.¹⁶³ While this contract is particularly lavish and made of very precious materials, it is not the only textile marriage contract known from the Egyptian context. Yusuf Raghib gives a list of known or published textile marriage contracts of aristocrats, both from the Fatimid and later eras.¹⁶⁴

The inscription on the Fatimid textile contract refers to a specific event which occurred between two Fatimid aristocrats and their families. In contrast, despite its legal phrasing, the event which may have led to the embroideries on the alb is not obviously definable. However, one particular detail relevant to the legal function of the alb is the close resemblance between the alb's inscription and contemporary Norman administrative documents. The inscription's bilingual form, as well as the content of the inscriptions, is reminiscent of these. Both the Latin and the Arabic inscriptions list William II's titles and territorial claims, attesting to the legitimacy of the king's authority. In the Latin, William II is given the title of 'King of Sicily, of the duchy of Apulia and of the principality of Capua'. The Arabic is more fanciful, declaring William the king of Italy, Ankuburda (possibly Lombardy), Calabria and Sicily.¹⁶⁵ Similarities can be noted, for example, with a Norman document listing estate boundaries from 1182;¹⁶⁶ there is the same recourse to bilingualism and similar formulations are employed. As I shall argue in the last chapter, the alb's textile inscription has a documentary function with a distinctly legal connotation. The inscription – like the institutionalised Fatimid *ṭirāz* – also functions as an official publication and confirmation of the position of the king. The difference is, once again, that *ṭirāz* would have circulated, whereas the Norman garments would have been worn by the king and been seen only by a restricted audience.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 31, note 3.

¹⁶⁵ Johns mentions a diplomatic letter sent by the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ to Roger II in which a similar list of territorial possessions is given. JOHNS (2006), p. 325.

¹⁶⁶ METCALFE (2002), pp. 114–26. Johns (2002), cat. 44, p. 313. The document is transcribed in Salvatore CUSA, *I diplomi greci ed arabi di Sicilia pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti ed illustrati*, Palermo 1868–82, Cologne (1982), pp. 179–244.

5 Similarities and Differences in Production Modes, Style, Content and Function

The comparison of the circumstances of the production of inscribed courtly textiles in Fatimid Egypt and Norman Sicily has shown that the Norman adoption of this ornamental motif from Arabic culture did not go hand in hand with the adoption of the institutional structure underlying Arabic *ṭirāz* production. There are great institutional, formal and partly also functional differences between inscribed textiles in Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt. Although many parallels can be observed, the comparison clearly underlines that the Arabic textile inscriptions at the Norman court of Sicily cannot be fully incorporated within the frame of Latin court culture or within the Arabic court culture described here. As we have seen, however, the written sources also testify to the existence of numerous workshops and stores (usually referred to as *khizāna*, pl. *khazā'in*) in Fatimid Cairo. In these *khazā'in* the caliph's own garments and courtly furnitures were made, stored and cared for – and sometimes viewed by the caliph in person. In my opinion, it is these *khazā'in* – for example, the *khizānat al-kiswa* (*khizāna* of robes) – and not the Fatimid *ṭirāz*, which most resemble the type of workshop from which the Norman mantle and alb may have originated.

Any consideration of the similarities and differences in the styles and contents of textile inscriptions in Fatimid Egypt and Norman Sicily needs to be undertaken cautiously, as much of the material has been lost on both sides. Moreover, publications on the Fatimid *ṭirāz* have so far privileged historical inscriptions, so that a lot of other inscribed material remains unknown. What the survey of material evidence shows, however, is that in contrast to the Fatimid historical *ṭirāz* inscriptions, which are usually phrased according to the same scheme, there is a lack of standardised content in the Sicilian group of inscribed textiles. Although parallels can be detected in the formulation of Norman and Fatimid textile inscriptions, the overview of each of the Arabic-inscribed Norman pieces shows that none of them copy word for word any Fatimid textile inscription. Instead, it seems that the artisans of the Norman court selected or modified some elements to suit their own needs, while other elements have no known parallels in the Fatimid context or the broader Arab-dominated regions.

This difference might, of course, be attributed to pure arbitrariness, or ignorance on the part of the Norman craftsmen. One might also think, as David Knipp has suggested, that the Norman craftsmen were working from disparate models in various media, available at the Norman court through Mediterranean contacts.¹⁶⁷ In this way,

¹⁶⁷ In his article on Norman *stanza* in the palace of Palermo, Knipp suggests that the ornamental motifs may have been taken from small-scale precious objects with royal connotations (Spanish ivories, for example, or Maghrebi woodwork), which were then 'blown up' to monumental size and translated into the medium of mosaic. KNIPP (2003/4), pp. 198–99.

they may have been copying and adopting inscriptions from these objects, regardless of their ‘appropriateness’ to the textile medium: the style of the mantle’s inscription in particular is an oddity in the textile medium and more reminiscent of monumental epigraphy or inscriptions on metal and wooden objects.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, as the final part of the comparison has shown, the political function of textile inscriptions is clear on both sides of the comparison. This implies that the Norman inscriptions cannot be considered the results of a random choice, dependent on whatever was available for use in the new courtly idiom of the Normans. Instead, and this corroborates my initial hypothesis, the choices underlying the use of Arabic textile inscriptions on the Norman royal garments appear to have been grounded in an awareness of the different functions of *ṭirāz* textiles in the Arab Mediterranean. More specifically, in the absence of a Norman textile institution comparable to the Fatimid *ṭirāz*, this political function of the Norman textile inscriptions seems to derive mainly from an awareness of the functions attributed to the form of writing and to inscriptions of a royal name.

168 AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 32.

Chapter III

Contextualising Ornament: Seeing and Reading Arabic Textile Inscriptions in Norman Public Display

Providing the setting for the subsequent analysis of the inscribed Norman mantle and alb, this chapter sets the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions in the context of Norman public writing and ceremony. Norman trilingualism and the important role of Arabic in the court are to be understood as intentional Norman policy, rather than as passive reflections of Sicilian society. As this chapter shows, the use of Arabic in textile inscriptions was an active choice, one which did not depend upon the origin of the craftsmen. By setting the Norman royal garments in the context of their ceremonial use in Norman Palermo, I further suggest that the Arabic textile inscriptions did not carry a single message alone, but that the function and meaning of this ornament varied according to how it was displayed and according to the political needs of the various Norman kings.

Using the comparative approach and the notion of transfer in the previous chapters has helped to define the distinctive features of the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions in relation to examples taken from Latin and Arabic court cultures. This chapter, in turn, and the following ones propose to clarify the choices underlying the use of this ornament in the political language of the Norman kings. Concentrating on inscriptions on textiles is a useful way of limiting the focus in an otherwise vast transcultural discourse. At this point, however, the phenomenon of ornamental inscriptions on textiles will be assessed within the broader frame of ‘political’ inscriptions at the service of the Norman court. The underlying assumption is that any public inscription associated with the patronage of the court is imbued with a political dimension and can thus be considered a political statement.¹

There are several types of courtly inscriptions which may be considered ‘public’, including epigraphy in various media, chancery documents and coins.² To contextual-

¹ The preceding chapter has established this also for the Fatimid context. On the political functions of medieval Latin inscriptions, see Robert FAVREAU, *Études d'épigraphie médiévale*, Limoges 1995, pp. 456–57. See also Walter KOCH, *Epigraphik des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, in: id. and Theo KÖLZER (eds), *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde*, Cologne 2009, pp. 425–44; Renate KOHN, *Das Medium Inschrift als Instrument der Informationsvermittlung. Funktion und Aussage hochmittelalterlicher Inschriften im Südosten des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, in: Reinhard HÄRTEL et al. (eds), *Schriftkultur zwischen Donau und Adria bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, Klagenfurt 2008, pp. 449–80.

² On Norman coins and their role in establishing Norman Sicily's ‘radically multi-lingual literary culture’ see Karla MALLETT, *Translating Sicily, Medieval Encounters* 9/1 (2003), pp. 140–63. See also: Lucia TRAVAINI, *The Normans between Byzantium and the Islamic World*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), pp. 179–96; Graham LOUD, *Coinage, Wealth and Plunder in the Age of Robert Guiscard*,

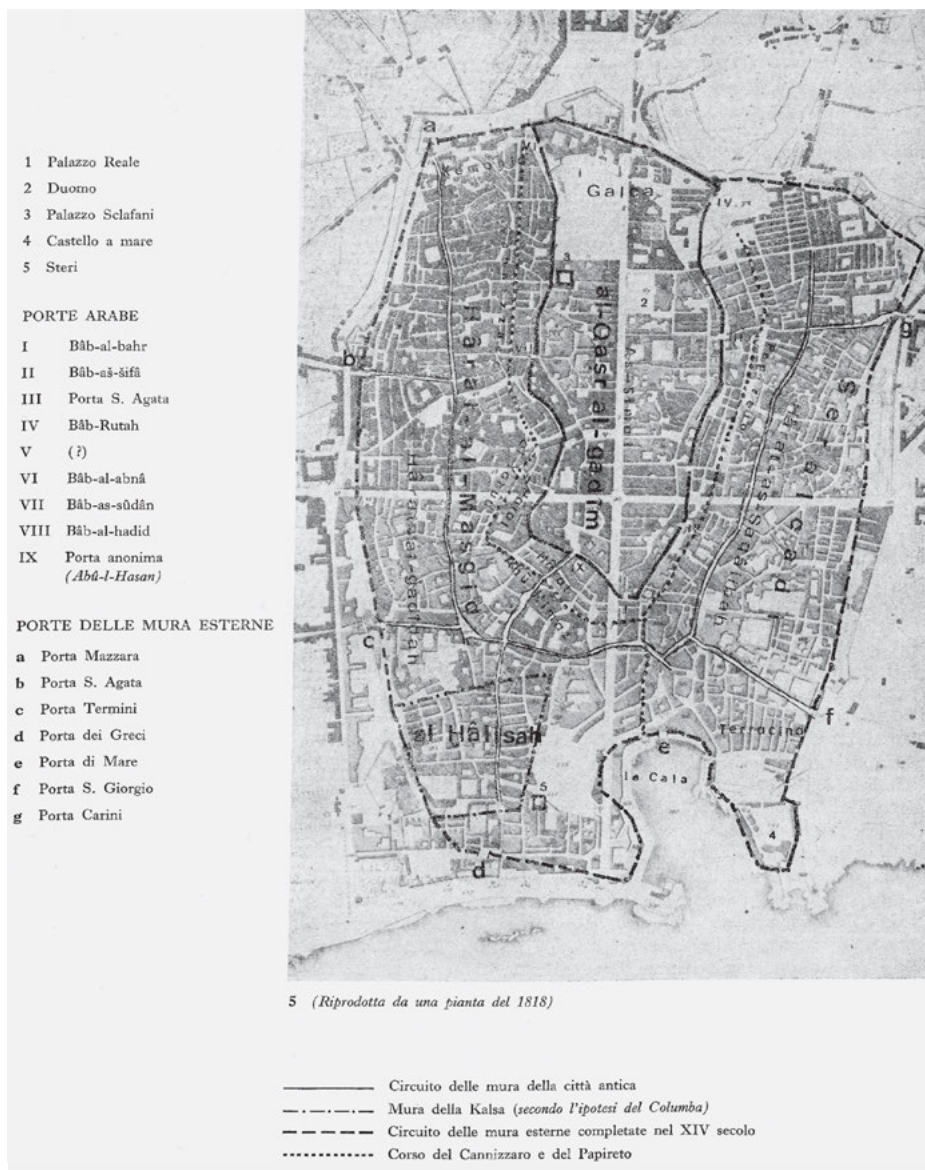


Fig. 59: Medieval Palermo, markings on a map from 1818.

in: *English Historical Review* 114 (1999), pp. 815–43; Lucia TRAVAINI, The Monetary Reforms of King William II (1166–1189): Oriental and Western Patterns in Norman Sicilian Coinage, in: *Schweizer Münzblätter* 46 (1996), pp. 109–23.

ise the production of the inscribed garments for Roger II and William II, the focus here lies on the first two: epigraphy and chancery documents.³ Since we know there were strong links between the production of the ceremonial garments and the Palermitan court, moreover, the focus will essentially be on Palermo (Fig. 59). This excludes the duchy of Apulia and the principality of Capua, whose artistic production is generally less studied.⁴ I propose to enter the discussion on the role of Arabic textile inscriptions in Palermitan public writing sponsored by the courts of Roger II and William II by questioning certain frequently encountered topoi about the Sicilian '*populus trilinguis*' and the 'Arabic facet' of the Norman court. This will serve to reposition Arabic in the output of public writing at the Norman court and to emphasise the deliberateness of the choice of the language to appear on the royal garments.

1 The '*Populus Trilinguis*' and the Three Languages of the Court

At the time of the Norman conquest of Sicily, Arabic was the language spoken by the majority of the population – it was also the language of administration and culture – whereas Greek would have been restricted to some eastern Sicilian cities and monastic communities. Shortly after the conquest of the island by the Normans, Greek was established as the main official language; Latin was progressively introduced only in the course of the twelfth century.⁵ Arabic remained the language of large proportions of the population and was replaced by the vernaculars of the conquerors only at the end of the thirteenth century.⁶ This linguistically diverse society is usually studied within three different fields: Arabists studying Arabic written sources and literature, Byzantinists studying the Greek texts, and Latinists dealing with Latin.⁷ Though identifying specific functions for the three languages of literary production,⁸ in her study of Siculo-Norman literary history Karla Mallette convincingly argues in favour of a unified analysis of Norman literary sources, identifying Norman 'polyglossia' as con-

³ The interrelations of courtly epigraphy and chancery documents have been the subject of several important studies by Jeremy Johns, for example: JOHNS (2002). On the relationship between cultural production and administration of the Norman kingdom, see also Theo KÖLZER, *Cancellaria e cultura nel regno di Sicilia (1130–1198)*, in: Germano GUALDO (ed.), *Cancellaria e cultura nel Medio Evo*, Vatican 1990, pp. 97–118; Robert-Henri BAUTIER, *Chancellerie et culture au Moyen Age*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 1–76.

⁴ An article by Linda Safran is an important step towards redressing this imbalance with regards to the study of epigraphy. Linda SAFRAN, *Public Textual Cultures: A Case-Study in Southern Italy*, in: William ROBINS (ed.), *Textual Cultures in Medieval Italy*, Toronto 2011, pp. 115–45.

⁵ JOHNS (2002), p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5; Alberto VARVARO, *Lingua e storia in Sicilia: Dalle guerre puniche alla conquista normanna*, Palermo 1981.

⁷ MALLETT (2003), p. 141.

⁸ Latin seems to be used mainly for historical texts and translations from Greek and Arabic, Greek mainly for pastoral works, Arabic for poetry. MALLETT (2003), p. 140.

stitutive of Norman literary culture and as a defining characteristic of Norman Sicily as a whole.⁹ Mallette's very sophisticated analysis not only sets a new cornerstone in the study of Norman Sicily as a culturally diverse whole, her thesis also once again relativises the 'foreignness' of Arabic in the Norman courtly idiom, very much in line with the current approaches of Mediterranean history.

Greek, Latin and Arabic were also the official languages of the Norman court. They were the languages in which documents were issued in the chancery and the languages used for the Norman epigraphic inscriptions.¹⁰ Keeping Mallette's thesis in mind, I propose, in the following, to take a closer look at the tripartite linguistic division perceived in Norman Sicily. In fact, trilingualism as a concept is ubiquitous not only in modern scholarly literature on Norman Sicily,¹¹ but it is already traceable in medieval sources. In his *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, Petrus de Ebulo, for example, writes of the people of Palermo and of their grief at William II's death in 1189. To them, William II's heirless death would certainly have meant a period of insecurity:¹²

*Hactenus urbs felix, populo dotata trilingui,
Corde ruit, fluitat pectore, mente cadit:
Ore, manu, lacrimis clamant, clamoribus instant
Cum pueris iuvenes, cum iuniore senes;
Dives, inops, servus, liber, pius, impius, omnes
Exequias equo pondere regis agunt.*

According to Petrus de Ebulo's account, old and young, rich and poor, slaves and freemen, believers and unbelievers all came together in the king's last honours. The author refers to Palermo as a city with a 'trilingual people' ('*hactenus urbs felix, populo dotata trilingui*'), in which life used to be happy. Implicitly, the passage sees William II and his Norman predecessors as the guarantors of social cohesion, a dynasty allowing this trilingual and diverse society to thrive.

⁹ On Norman multilingualism in literary history and its constitutive role in the construction of the Norman state, see Karla MALLETT, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250. A Literary History*, Philadelphia 2005.

¹⁰ The only piece of evidence for inscriptions in other alphabets comes from the quadrilingual tombstone of Anna (Museo della Zisa), which bears a Judaeo-Arabic text in Hebrew letters. JOHNS, in: *No-biles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.7 b.

¹¹ An analysis of the assumptions underlying the studies of the Norman '*populus trilinguis*' is given in METCALFE (2009), pp. 247–50.

¹² Petrus de Ebulo, *Book in Honor of Augustus (Liber ad Honorem Augusti)*, trans. by Gwenyth HOOD (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 398), Tempe AR 2012, pp. 90–91. 'The city, fortunate until now, her people learned in three tongues collapses in heart, wavers in breast, is prostrate in mind; with words, with hands, with tears they cry out and rush together crying, the boys with the youths, the young with the old; rich, poor, slave, free, pious, impious, all perform the funeral rites of the king with equal heaviness.'

However, the idea of trilingualism fails to account for the large number of other languages spoken in Norman Sicily, including various Latin vernaculars, Berber and Aramaic.¹³ Moreover, the tripartite division of Sicilian society into confessional groups (Christians following the Latin or Greek rite, and Muslims), which is all too easily associated with the topos of trilingualism, is equally reductive.¹⁴ There is ample evidence for the presence of Arab Christians, or 'Mozarabs', in Norman Palermo.¹⁵ Arab Christians were active as notaries in the royal chancery, responsible also for the translations of documents issued by the royal administration.¹⁶ Their families lived in close proximity to the Norman palace of Palermo, and an important Arab Christian community had gathered around the church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.¹⁷ In addition, there is not only evidence of several Christian liturgical manuscripts in Greek, Latin and Arabic, which would probably have been used also by Arab Christians,¹⁸ but also a written source which mentions the presence of a church with Arabic rites – '*ad ritum Sarracenorum*' – as late as the fourteenth century, which appears to have been located in the East of Sicily.¹⁹ Ludolf of Sundheim's use of the word 'Saracens' here to refer to the Arabs is particularly interesting, since it shows that the term was not necessarily used only to refer to Muslim Arabs.

Trilingualism as a concept gives far too simple a picture of the complex Sicilian society. In fact, the focus on these particular three languages is a courtly projection

13 JOHNS (2002), p. 4. An idea of the various origins of individuals from Palermo, Catania and Cefalù, for example, can be gleaned from the analysis of names mentioned in documents of the 11th–12th c. See AMARI/NALLINO (1933–39), vol. 3.1, pp. 210–13.

14 This appears to differ slightly from the situation of medieval Iberia, as described by María Angeles Gallego: María Angeles GALLEGO, *The Languages of Medieval Iberia and their Religious Dimension*, in: *Medieval Encounters* 9/1 (2003), pp. 107–39.

15 Henri BRESCE, Anneliese NEF, *Les Mozarabes de Sicile (1100–1300)*, in: Errico CUOZZO and Jean-Marie MARTIN (eds), *Cavalieri alla conquista del Sud: Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Léon-Robert Ménager*, Bari 1998, pp. 134–56. For an impression of the variety of Sicilian society, see LOUD/METCALFE (2002).

16 BRESCE/NEF (1998), p. 149. See also Henri BRESCE, Anneliese NEF, *Les actes en arabe dans la Sicile d'époque normande*, in: *Publications de la Sorbonne, L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge (Orient – Occident)*, Paris 2009, pp. 73–87. For a critical analysis of the role of Muslims at the Norman court, see METCALFE (2009), pp. 195–96.

17 Henri BRESCE, *Le royaume normand d'Afrique et l'archevêché de Mahdiyya*, in: Michel BALARD and Alain DUCÉLLIER (eds), *Le partage du monde: Echanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, Paris 1998, p. 366.

18 Two Latin, Greek and Arabic psalters have been tentatively ascribed to a Sicilian provenance. See Robert DEVRESSE, *Les manuscrits grecs de l'Italie méridionale (Histoire, classement, paléographie)*, Vatican 1955.

19 '*Tamen in Sicilia indifferenter ad tres ritus se habent: in una parte ad ritum latinum, in alia ad ritum Graecorum, in tertia ad ritum Sarracenorum; attamen, omnes sunt christiani, licet ritu differant et discordent.*' Ludolphus de Suchem, *Ludolphi, rectoris ecclesiae parochialis in Suchem, De itinere terrae sanctae liber*, ed. by Ferdinand DEYCKS, Stuttgart 1851, p. 20.

rather than an accurate reflection of Norman society.²⁰ But it can nevertheless be considered an essential component of the political idiom of the Norman kings. It is this projection, an element of Norman royal self-representation, which is reflected in contemporary chronicles and, as we shall see, in the artistic commissions of the Norman court.

Political readings of the Norman arts of Sicily are, of course, no novelty. In fact, one particular aspect of the arts promoted by the Norman court – its often discussed ‘hybridity’ – has attracted various political interpretations; a causal link is often set up between the heterogeneity of the Sicilian society and the stylistically ‘hybrid’ artistic output of the Norman court. The concept of hybridity is used not only for the multiple stylistic elements which can be traced in the arts of Norman Sicily, but also to describe its multilingual and multi-religious court and society.²¹ For the analysis of the Norman objects, the concept of hybridity carries the danger of being used as a description of a passive amalgamation of elements.²² This problem has been pointed out by several authors, who draw attention to the questionable premise of the concept of cultural hybridity, that cultures are ‘pure’ and homogeneous before they are hybridised through contact with others.²³

Alex Metcalfe summarises the scholarly positions as follows: ‘Under Roger II, trilingual inscriptions and an awkward confluence of Arabo-Islamic, Byzantine and Romanesque architectural and decorative styles in the royal chapel and palaces have been understood as an attempt to reconcile the recent unification of the realm with the reality of a society divided by religion, language, politics and culture.’²⁴ However,

20 METCALFE (2002), pp. 301–03.

21 Norman artistic hybridity is described in the work of Charles Haskins, though in negative terms, as an absence of visual identity, since ‘the Normans, in Bertaux’s phrase, contributed little more than the cement which bound together the artistic materials furnished by others.’ Charles H. HASKINS, *The Normans in European History*, New York 1915, p. 240. On the use of the term ‘hybridity’ in the study of Mediterranean cultures, see Stefan BURKHARDT et al., *Hybridisierung von Zeichen und Formen durch mediterrane Eliten*, in: Michael BORGOLTE et al. (eds), *Integration und Desintegration der Kulturen im europäischen Mittelalter*, Berlin 2011, pp. 467–557. A critical overview of texts which employ the topos of hybridity with reference to the arts of Norman Sicily can be found in TRONZO (1997), pp. 13–14.

22 TRONZO (1997), p. 14.

23 Gerhard WOLF, *Alexandria aus Athen zurückerobert? Perspektiven einer mediterranen Kunstgeschichte mit einem Seitenblick auf das mittelalterliche Sizilien*, in: Margit MERSCH and Ulrike RITZERFELD (eds), *Lateinisch-griechisch-arabische Begegnungen*, Berlin 2009, p. 62. See also id., *Fluid Borders, Hybrid Objects: Mediterranean Art Histories 500 – 1500, Questions of Method and Terminology*, in: Jaynie ANDERSON (ed.), *Crossing Cultures, Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, Carlton 2009, pp. 134–37. On ‘entanglement’ as an alternative methodological notion to deal with transculturalism, see Michael WERNER, Bénédicte ZIMMERMANN, *Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), pp. 607–36.

24 Metcalfe refers to the works of Otto Demus, Ernst Kitzinger, Eve Borsook and William Tronzo. METCALFE (2002), pp. 301–03.

Metcalfe adds a clear note of caution to the often attempted correlation of the art history of Norman Sicily with its socio-political history.²⁵ For example, he points at some major discrepancies between the type of ideal kingship promoted under Roger II, as a system in which different languages, cultures and arts were united under the all-encompassing mantle of his Christian rule, and the reality of the Norman kingdom, which remained divided along religious lines.²⁶ The arts and multilingual epigraphic inscriptions of Norman Sicily, therefore, should be seen as projecting an idealised image of kingship rather than as depictions of a socio-political reality.²⁷ So trilingualism as a courtly choice, and as a defining characteristic of Norman culture in Mallette's sense, rather than a passive reflection of Norman society, provides an important point of departure for the contextualisation of Arabic public writing and for an assessment of its role within the courtly idioms of Roger II and William II.

2 The Weight of Arabic in Norman Public Writing: A Distorted Picture?

It is difficult to provide a representative overview of the output of public writing by the Norman court, especially since scholars have given precedence to Arabic over the other official languages. I intend to start with a brief description of the sources which have, so far, been comparatively marginal to the study of Norman Sicilian art and architecture. This overview makes no pretence at completeness, but it does provide an opportunity to redress the picture of a predominance of Arabic in the public writing of Norman Sicily, which the focus of the present study may have formed throughout the previous chapters. I also propose to discuss the possible reasons for linguistic choices, before embarking on analysing more closely the Arabic textile inscriptions on Roger II's mantle and William II's alb in the last two chapters.

²⁵ METCALFE (2002), p. 303.

²⁶ 'Indeed one might query whether a kingship as self-conscious as that set up by George of Antioch for Roger II and which apparently proclaimed the ideal of linguistic, artistic and cultural diversity within the setting of a harmonious Christian kingdom could ever have been compatible with a society that had also been carefully divided up along religious lines. Propaganda, experiment or otherwise, the theory behind the kingship and the practicalities of its rule did not always add up, for while some aspects emphasised the kingdom's unity, others betrayed its opposing diversities.' METCALFE (2002), p. 301.

²⁷ METCALFE (2002), p. 303. An excellent article by Joshua Birk underlines the complexities of Norman society; it takes the case study of the trial of Philip of Mahdiyya as its starting-point. See Joshua C. BIRK, *From Borderlands to Borderlines: Narrating the Past of Twelfth-Century Sicily*, in: James P. HELFERS (ed.), *Multicultural Europe and Cultural Exchange in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Turnhout 2005, pp. 9–31.

For the study of Arabic epigraphy in Norman Sicily, Michele Amari's systematic catalogue, published in the late nineteenth century, remains unrivalled. His catalogue, which was re-edited by Francesco Gabrieli in 1971, is an essential tool also for scholars concerned with the material remnants of pre-Norman, Islamic Sicily.²⁸ Among the more recent studies on Arabic epigraphy from Norman Sicily, on the other hand, Johns and Vincenza Grassi's publications stand out.²⁹ There is no comparable corpus of Norman inscriptions in the two other official languages of the Norman court to counterbalance this interest in Arabic epigraphy. References to Greek and Latin inscriptions are scarce and scattered.³⁰ The pre-eminence of Arabic studies and the common restriction of epigraphic studies on Norman Sicily to material in one language only – depending on the specific interests and linguistic competence of the author – risks creating a distorted picture of the remaining material evidence.

The administrative output of the Norman court has been more reliably published than the remaining epigraphic material. A large number of surviving documents from the Norman chancery, in all three official languages, has been edited and studied. The Greek documents, for example, were published by Salvatore Cusa, whose 1882 edition of the Greek and Arabic documents is still an essential tool for further research.³¹ Johns' monograph on the Norman royal *dīwān*, on the other hand, is certainly the central work for the few remaining Arabic documents from Norman Sicily.³² The comparatively large number of surviving Latin documents from the Norman chancery has been published comprehensively in the *Codex diplomaticus regni Siciliae*, a multi-

28 Michele AMARI, *Le epigrafi arabiche di Sicilia: Trascritte, tradotte e illustrate* (a cura di Francesco Gabrieli), Palermo 1971 (henceforth AMARI/GABRIELI). Id., *Le epigrafi arabiche di Sicilia trascritte tradotte e illustrate. Iscrizioni sepolcrali* (parte seconda), Palermo 1879; and id., *Le epigrafi arabiche di Sicilia trascritte tradotte e illustrate. Iscrizioni edili* (parte prima), Palermo 1875.

29 JOHNS (2006); Jeremy JOHNS, *Iscrizioni arabe nella Cappella Palatina*, in: Salvatore SETTIS and Beat BRENNK (eds), *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo*, Modena 2010, pp. 353–86; Vincenza GRASSI, *Le iscrizioni normanne in caratteri arabi in Sicilia*, in: *Studi Magrebini* 24 (1992), pp. 29–38.

30 An unpublished thesis completed in 2010 at the University of Padua provides a catalogue of Latin epigraphy in Palermo from the 12th–15th c.: Antonella UNDIEMI, *Le iscrizioni medievali di Palermo* (sec. 12.–15.), *Tesi di Laurea*, University of Padua 2010. I would like to express my gratitude to Antonella Undiemi for providing me with a copy. On the Norman Greek inscription in the dome of the Cappella Palatina, see Barbara CROSTINI, *L'iscrizione greca nella cupola della Cappella Palatina: Edizione e commento*, in: Salvatore SETTIS and Beat BRENNK (eds), *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo*, Modena 2010, pp. 187–202.

31 CUSA (1982). See Vera VON FALCKENHAUSEN, *I diplomi dei re normanni in lingua greca*, in: Giuseppe DE GREGORIO and Otto KRESTEN (eds), *Documenti medievali greci e latini: Studi comparativi*, Spoleto 1998, pp. 253–308.

32 JOHNS (2002). See also BRESCH/NEF (2009); Jeremy JOHNS, Nadia JAMIL, *Signs of the Times: Arabic Signatures as a Measure of Acculturation in Norman Sicily*, in: *Muqarnas* 21 (2004), pp. 181–92.

volume publication with commented editions, divided according to the rulers under which the documents were issued.³³

The brief historiographical overview shows clearly the problem of fragmentation faced by scholars of Norman administration and of Norman epigraphy that Mallette also pointed out for literary studies. They are split along linguistic lines and, as importantly, along the disciplinary divides between Byzantine, Islamic and European medieval history. Norman multilingual inscriptions, for example, which – as we shall see – provide a close formal link between epigraphy and chancery documents, have not yet been studied as a group, although they probably represent the most distinctive type of Norman public writing. These restrictions make any attempt to reconstruct a representative picture of the varied and scattered information on Norman public writing extremely difficult. What can be clearly derived from the publications, however, is that disproportionate attention has been given to Arabic epigraphy, while the situation is more balanced for publications on the Norman administration.

One important fact to note at this point is that the overwhelming majority of Norman administrative documents issued during the core period of the Norman kingdom (1130–1189) was written in Latin. The prevalence of Latin is particularly clear for chancery activity during the relatively short reign of Roger II's successor, William I (r. 1154–1166). Of the thirty-five surviving documents, thirty are in Latin and five are in Greek or are bilingual documents (seven of the total appear to be later forgeries).³⁴ Two of the bilingual documents are written in Greek and Arabic, and so are listed by Johns. In addition, Johns lists two further documents in Arabic, one of which has only survived in a thirteenth-century Latin translation.³⁵ It is worth noting, moreover, that even among Johns' forty-six entries for extant or recorded Arabic documents from the Norman and Hohenstaufen administration (1093–1242), only very few are written exclusively in Arabic. In fact, thirty of the thirty-six Arabic documents from the Norman chancery which actually survive in their original form are bilingual.³⁶ In contrast to the epigraphic material from Norman Sicily, no trilingual documents issued by the Norman chancery are known.

The situation is slightly different for epigraphy. The Arabic elements of Norman Sicily may well have been given disproportionate attention in comparison with Greek and Latin. It seems, nevertheless, that Arabic inscriptions had a certain weight, both in quantity and in the quality of their execution and materials, which suggests that

³³ Carlrichard BRÜHL, Francesco GIUNTA, André GUILLOU (eds), *Codex diplomaticus Regni Siciliae*, Cologne 1982–96.

³⁴ Graham LOUD, *The Chancery and Charters of the Kings of Sicily (1130–1212)*, in: *English Historical Review* 124 (2009), pp. 781–82.

³⁵ JOHNS (2002), cat. 33, 34, 35, 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298. In addition to these Arabic documents from the royal administration, Johns provides a provisional catalogue of thirty-two private documents from the same period.

they may have played a particularly important role in the Norman kings' self-representation.

Amari's catalogue of Arabic epigraphy includes around eighty Arabic monumental and funerary inscriptions which date from the pre-Norman and Norman periods.³⁷ Grassi provides references to a further eighteen Arabic inscriptions mentioned in literary sources, but which no longer survive.³⁸ Arabic inscriptions thus appear to have been numerous in medieval Sicily. However, there is an important distinction to be made between public and private inscriptions – between those which can be associated with courtly patronage and those which were commissioned privately. Most of the Arabic inscriptions contained in Amari's catalogue, particularly the funerary ones, were commissioned by private patrons. The number of Arabic inscriptions associated with the Norman court, on the other hand, amounts to around twenty, including those listed by Johns and a few additional examples, such as stucco frames from the windows of the twelfth-century Norman churches of San Giovanni degli Eremiti and Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio in Palermo (Fig. 89).³⁹ Most, if not all, of these inscriptions were commissioned after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Sicily in 1130, which led Johns to argue that Roger II and his minister George of Antioch intentionally fashioned an 'Arabic facet' of Norman rule aimed at the proclamation of an authority to be recognised well beyond the borders of southern Italy and Latin Europe.⁴⁰

Before discussing further the reasons behind the inclusion of Arabic public inscriptions in the visual idiom of royal display, I shall briefly introduce some aspects of Latin and Greek public writing in Sicily to provide an epigraphic context for the Arabic inscriptions on the royal garments. It is not my aim to present a catalogue of overlooked epigraphic material. Instead, I propose to clarify some of the functions assumed by the Norman epigraphic inscriptions and give an idea of the great visibility of public inscriptions in all three official languages in the urban landscape of Palermo.

The complex of the two facing churches of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and San Cataldo offers a marvellous illustration of the extent to which the three official languages of the Norman court were applied in its artistic commissions (Fig. 60). Both

³⁷ Some of Amari's examples are later imports which were present in Sicily at the time of the compilation of his catalogue. Catalogue entry XXV, for example, is an epitaph from Egypt. AMARI (1879), pp. 90–92.

³⁸ Vincenza GRASSI, *Şikilliya*, The Encyclopedia of Islam (second edition), vol. 9 (1997), p. 590.

³⁹ Francesca DELL'ACQUA, *Parvenus ecclettici e il canone estetico della varietas: Riflessioni su alcuni dettagli di arredo architettonico nell'Italia meridionale normanna*, in: KNIPP (2003/4), pp. 61 and 62.

⁴⁰ Johns argues that the message of the Arabic inscriptions was aimed at a broad public, including Muslims, who were meant to note an analogy between the Norman kings and Islamic rulers and thus recognise their authority. JOHNS (2006), p. 332.



Fig. 60: View of San Cataldo and Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, Palermo.

churches originate from the close entourage of the court; they were commissioned in the mid-twelfth century by two of the most important political figures of the time – the ministers George of Antioch (d. 1151/2) and Maio of Bari (d. 1160). There is a long, painted Arabic inscription inside the dome of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (Fig. 61), which is also crowned with a frieze with a Greek inscription running atop its facade. San Cataldo, on the other hand, boasts a long Latin inscription (Fig. 62) placed in the same location along the top of the facade, thus providing a visual counterpoint to the decorative frieze on George of Antioch's church.

While these particular Palermitan churches are closely related to the Norman court, the use of all three official languages can also be seen in private contexts, including inscriptions in the rarely studied southern Italian provinces of the Norman kingdom.⁴¹ The multilingual juxtaposition of Greek, Latin and Arabic on public

⁴¹ As Linda Safran has shown, trilingualism in non-courtly epigraphy can also be detected in medieval Salento, for instance, where inscriptions in Hebrew, Latin and Greek have been found. See

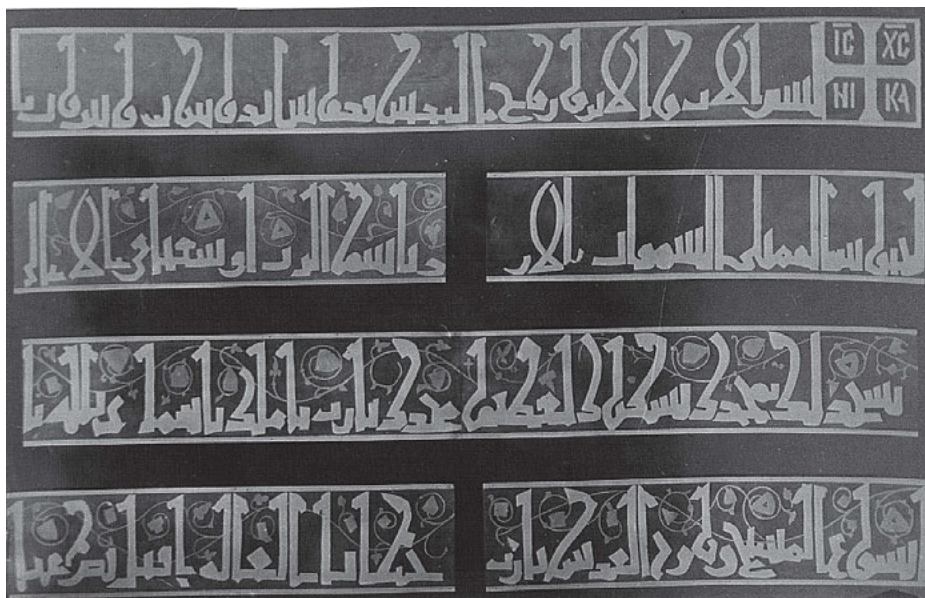


Fig. 61: Painted Arabic inscription in the dome of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.

and legal texts, on the other hand, was a prerogative of the Norman kings and their close entourage.⁴² There are numerous bilingual administrative documents, as well as five multilingual epigraphic inscriptions from Norman Sicily, in the three official languages of the Norman administration. These include two trilingual inscriptions from the period of Roger II, commemorating a water clock in Palermo (Fig. 63)⁴³ and a public building in Termini Imerese.⁴⁴ Furthermore, there are two multilingual funer-

SAFRAN (2011). For Palermo, Undiemi lists a number of Latin funerary inscriptions unrelated to the Norman court. UNDIEMI (2010).

⁴² JOHNS (2002), p. 298. There are very interesting parallels with the Castilian court. See, for example: Heather ECKER, *How to Administer a Conquered City in Al-Andalus: Mosques, Parish Churches and Parishes*, in: Cynthia ROBINSON and Leyla ROUHI (eds), *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, Leiden, Boston 2005, pp. 45–65; Gerold HILTY, *El plurilingüismo en la corte de Alfonso X el Sabio*, in: María Teresa Echenique-Elizondo and Juan Sánchez-Méndez (eds), *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Historia de la Lengua Española*, Madrid 2002, pp. 207–20; Robert I. BURNS, Paul E. CHEVEDDEN (eds), *Negotiating Cultures: Bilingual Surrender Treaties in Muslim-Crusader Spain under James the Conqueror*, Leiden, Boston, Cologne 1999; Manuel GONZÁLEZ JIMÉNEZ (ed.), *Diplomatario andaluz de Alfonso X*, Seville 1991; Francisco J. HERNÁNDEZ, *Language and Cultural Identity: The Mozarabs of Toledo*, in: *Boletín Burriel* 1 (1989), pp. 29–48; Evariste LÉVI-PROVENÇAL, *Inscriptions arabes d'Espagne*, Leiden 1931.

⁴³ AMARI (1875), cat. II.

⁴⁴ Ibid., cat. VIII.



Fig. 62: Sculpted frieze with Latin inscription, mid-12th c., San Cataldo.

ary inscriptions marking the deaths of Anna and Drogo (Fig. 64), parents of a priest associated with Roger II's court, dated respectively to 1149 and 1153.⁴⁵ The last known multilingual inscription is the Latin and Arabic inscription found on the hem of the Norman alb.

While multilingual public writing thus appears to have been used at different periods of Norman rule, there is no evidence of any multilingual inscriptions from Sicily dating from before or after the Norman kingdom of Sicily (1130–1189). They seem to have been a novelty in the epigraphic landscape of medieval Sicily. As the examples of administrative documents listed by Johns and Cusa have shown, moreover, multilingualism in Greek, Latin and Arabic was also a characteristic feature of the Norman administration. In this case, however, multilingualism was used under Norman rule

⁴⁵ The epitaph for Anna is written in four languages, including a Judaeo-Arabic inscription (a transcription of Arabic into letters of the Hebrew alphabet). For a complete transcription, translation and analysis of the four inscribed languages, see JOHNS (2006), cat. VIII.7 b. See also Barbara ZEITLER, 'Urbs Felix Dotata Populo Trilingui': Some Thoughts about a Twelfth-century Funerary Memorial from Palermo, in: *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996), pp. 114–39. For a transcription of Drogo's epitaph, see JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.7 c.



Fig. 63: Trilingual foundation inscription for a water clock, 1142, central courtyard of the Norman Palace, Palermo.

even prior to the establishment of the kingdom. Multilingualism in public writing, therefore, ought to be regarded as distinctive of the Norman court,⁴⁶ and, given the exclusiveness of its use in courtly contexts, as a visual marker of Norman authority used for political purposes. Johns has referred to this multilingualism as the ‘politics of the *populus trilinguis*’, arguing that it aimed to express unity between the different confessional, ethnic and linguistic groups in Sicily through the rule of the Norman kings.⁴⁷

However, the three languages of the Norman court were also used separately. Latin inscriptions, for instance, can be found in many different media, on objects and architecture, inside and outside the remaining monuments. Moreover, a large number of the Latin inscriptions recorded by Antonella Undiemi were found on reused late antique marble sarcophagi, which is a reminder of the fact that Roman remains – and surely also inscriptions in Latin – may have had a strong visual presence in medieval Sicily.⁴⁸ Undiemi’s catalogue, which focuses exclusively on inscriptions on stone and metal, contains a total of twenty Latin inscriptions from Palermo, nine of which date from the Norman and Hohenstaufen period, ranging from 1142 to 1250.

⁴⁶ JOHNS (2002), pp. 297–98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁴⁸ UNDIEMI (2010). On the use of classical models in Norman coinage, see Horst ENZENSBERGER, Chanceries, Charters and Administration in Norman Italy, in: LOUD/METCALFE (2002), pp. 117–50.



Fig. 64: Epitaphs of Anna and Drogo (top).

Most of the Palermitan inscriptions listed relate to funerary artefacts. Epitaphs include that of Walter Offamil, for example, who was the archbishop of Palermo from 1168 to 1191,⁴⁹ or that of Richard Palmer, bishop-elect of Syracuse and one of the *familiares regis*, a close circle of advisors to William II.⁵⁰ Another funerary inscription in Undiemi's catalogue, documented also in Daniele, was found inscribed on a silver

⁴⁹ Edoardo D'ANGELO, *Suspecta familiaritas: Sur les rapports entre Guillaume II et Gauthier Ophamil*, in: Mariella COLIN, Marie-Agnès LUCAS-AVENEL (eds), *De la Normandie à la Sicile: Réalités, représentations, mythes*, Saint-Lô 2004, pp. 79–92.

⁵⁰ Hiroshi TAKAYAMA, *The Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, Leiden 1993, pp. 95–101 and 115–25.

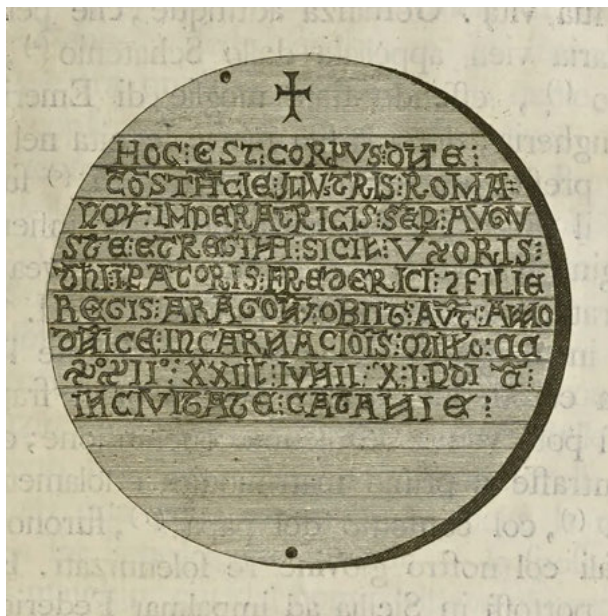


Fig. 65: Silver plaque from the sarcophagus of Constance of Aragon, c. 1222.

plaque inside the sarcophagus of Frederick II's wife Constance of Aragon (d. 1222) (Fig. 65). All of these Latin funerary inscriptions can be related to the broader circle of the Sicilian court and aristocracy, but only the silver plaque from the sarcophagus of Constance bears a direct relation with the Sicilian monarchs.

Another type of Latin inscription, perhaps more relevant to 'public writing', is the foundation inscription. Besides the multilingual epitaphs mentioned above, Roger II's priest Grisandus, for example, also commissioned a Latin inscription to commemorate the building of the chapel of Saint Anne in San Michele de Indulciis in 1149.⁵¹ The last, and longest, Latin inscription in Undiemi's catalogue, dated 1250, is yet another type. The Latin text, now found on a large marble slab inserted into the interior wall of the west facade of Palermo Cathedral, publicly proclaims a series of privileges issued or confirmed by the Emperor Frederick II (Fig. 104). Although no manuscript version of this text is known, this inscription appears to have faithfully reproduced the wording of legal documents issued by Frederick II's chancery. The public inscription in this case is also imbued with a distinctly legal overtone. As we shall see, all of these functions of epigraphy were also assumed by the Arabic public inscriptions of the Norman court.

The second official administrative language of Norman Sicily was Greek. Its importance in terms of its visual presence in the Norman artistic vocabulary is unde-

⁵¹ UNDIEMI (2010), cat. 18.

niable. To my knowledge, however, there is no separate study of Greek inscriptions in Norman Palermo; my references are limited to mentions of multilingual epigraphy which include Greek to the monumental frieze crowning the church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (mentioned above), and inscriptions in the mosaic cycles of Norman Sicily, which have been studied extensively.⁵² It is impossible, at this stage, to present an overview of the functions of inscriptions in Greek at the Norman court, or whether these functions differed from those of Arabic and Latin inscriptions.

One of the Greek inscriptions appears particularly noteworthy, nevertheless. This mosaic inscription in verse, which probably dates to 1143, was discovered around the base of the rotunda in the Cappella Palatina (Fig. 66). It is set above a Latin inscription and can be translated as follows:⁵³

'Other kings of old erected sanctuaries to other Saints; but I, Roger, mighty ruling king, (dedicate this church) to the foremost of the Lord's disciples, the leader and the archpriest Peter, to whom Christ entrusted His church, which He Himself had consecrated by the sacrifice of His blood [...] The third indiction [...] the fifty-first year in the correct measurement after 6000 and 600 years had elapsed in an ever moving cycle.'

This is the only Norman inscription in which the king speaks in the first person. The use of Greek to express the voice of the royal founder of the chapel, who, incidentally, appears to have had a Greek education,⁵⁴ indicates that this language would have had a high status at Roger II's court.

This very selective overview of epigraphy in Latin and Greek from Norman Palermo gives an idea of the epigraphic context in which the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions ought to be interpreted. Since information on epigraphy in languages other than Arabic has not been gathered systematically for Norman Sicily, any conclusions need to be drawn with great caution. What can be said, however, is that the use of Arabic was not necessarily restricted to the courtly sphere. This is particularly important to counterbalance Tronzo's suggestion that 'separate realms' may have been assigned to Byzantine and Islamic styles under Roger II, one restricted to religious arts and the other to the court.⁵⁵ Moreover, there were different types of inscriptions in all three

⁵² For example: Beat BRENK, *Arte del potere e la retorica dell'alterità: La cattedrale di Cefalù e San Marco a Venezia*, in: KNIPP (2003/4), pp. 83–100. Ernst KITZINGER, *I mosaici del Periodo normanno in Sicilia: La Cappella Palatina di Palermo*, Palermo 1993; Eve BORSOOK, *Messages in Mosaic: The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily (1130–1187)*, Oxford 1990; Ernst KITZINGER, *The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo: An Essay on the Choice and Arrangement of Subjects*, in: *The Art Bulletin* 31 (1949), pp. 269–92.

⁵³ Translation by Otto Demus, see GRUBE/JOHNS (2005), p. 2, note 10.

⁵⁴ On the Greek education of Roger II, see JOHNS (2002), p. 78.

⁵⁵ TRONZO (1997), p. 114. And *ibid.*, p. 140: 'The Kufic inscriptions communicated to the viewer the nature and significance of the royal function of the Cappella Palatina, staged primarily in the nave, as the Greek and Latin inscriptions of the sanctuary spoke to the liturgical function at the altar.'



Fig. 66: Greek and Latin mosaic inscriptions, Capella Palatina, Palermo.

languages, public inscriptions directly originating from the court and commissions by wealthy private patrons, but all three official languages seem to have been used in both cases. Epigraphy was also used to varying functions, decorating, commemorating events and patrons, and authenticating the monuments which they adorned as royal. This again raises the question of the visibility and legibility of public inscriptions and takes us back to the reception of the Arabic inscriptions on the Norman royal garments.

3 Staging Textile Inscriptions: The Norman Garments and Their Contemporary Audiences

The Arabic inscriptions on the garments of the Norman kings of Sicily oscillate between various degrees of visibility and readability, though – as shown in the second chapter – they appear to have been mostly illegible when the garments were used. It is clear, however, that their linguistic message was thought important during their conception at the Norman court.

To analyse the functions of the Norman textile inscriptions with reference to their reception in Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily, it is necessary to distinguish between the production and the reception of the garments; how they were received ought to be further subdivided by the occasions on which the garments were viewed and by whom. Such a contextual approach to the textiles requires careful historical framing, since the circumstances of viewing and the choices underlying the use of Arabic textile inscriptions as royal ornaments would, of course, have changed between Roger II's reign and William II's. This is the main preoccupation of the last two chapters; I aim here to concentrate more generally on the different ways of accessing the royal textiles in Norman Sicily.

3.1 Textiles Inside the Norman Palace of Palermo

Courtly textiles are mentioned prominently in Philagathos of Cerami's ekphrasis of the Cappella Palatina. Philagathos describes the entire chapel and mentions the impressive silk hangings there, which, as he claims, were made by 'the Phoenicians'.⁵⁶ We may thus imagine that sumptuous textiles – possibly imported ones in this case – played a prominent role in the visual idiom on display in the royal palace of Palermo.

However, we also have some evidence of the local production of textiles inside the palace from the previously mentioned description of the Norman palace in Falcandus' epistle lamenting the state of Sicily after William II's death.⁵⁷ This description of the *nobiles officinae*, as Falcandus calls the courtly textile workshops, is an extremely valuable document for our concerns, not only because of its factual details on the textile production of the Norman court, but also because it provides indirect testimony to the fact that the textiles kept inside the royal palace may occasionally have been seen.⁵⁸ It seems, for example, that Hugo Falcandus had access to the interior of the palace, since he was able to describe the architectural ornaments of the Cappella Palatina as well as the textile workshop. He also located the royal treasury precisely, stating that it was in the tower called the Torre Pisana, which is situated

⁵⁶ 'There are also many cloths hung from the walls, and these are crafted from threads of silk, woven with gold and in diverse other colours, which the Phoenicians have embellished with an art both rare and wonderful.' Maria ANDALORO, *La Cappella Palatina di Palermo e l'inventario del 1309 fra analisi e ragionamenti*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), p. 353. The term 'Phoenicians' may designate Ifriqiyyans: METCALFE (2009), p. 149. For an edition of Philagathos' homilies, see *Filagato da Cerami: Omelie per i vangeli domenicali e le feste di tutto l'anno*, ed. by Giuseppe ROSSI TAIBBI, Palermo 1969.

⁵⁷ The author of this epistle is referred to as 'Hugo Falcandus', but his actual identity is unclear. SIRAGUSA (1897), pp. 169–86. See also Salvatore TRAMONTANA, *La lettera dello pseudo Ugo Falcando: una lettura filologica*, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), pp. 81–90.

⁵⁸ SIRAGUSA (1897), pp. 178–80. LOUD/WIEDEMANN (1998), p. 259. See appendix for the Latin and an English translation.



Fig. 67: Torre Pisana,
Norman Palace, Palermo.

on the north-eastern side of the palace (Fig. 67). And the *Epistle* mentions where the eunuchs, women and children were living.⁵⁹

This insider knowledge suggests that Falcandus may have been a courtier and therefore granted access to many parts of the palace. However, he does not seem to have been the only visitor to the interior of the royal palace. Ibn Jubayr's account of his visit to Palermo in 1184, for example, contains a passage in which he describes being led through the public spaces of the palace. He was very impressed with their splendour:⁶⁰

'On arrival we made to enter [the city], but were stopped and directed to a gate near the palace of the Frankish King – may God relieve the Muslims of his dominance. Over esplanades, through doors and across royal courts they led us, gazing at the towering palaces, well-set piazzas and gardens and the ante-chambers given to the officials. All this amazed our eyes and dazzled our minds [...]. Amongst the things we observed was a hall set in a large court enclosed by a garden and flanked by colonnades. The hall occupied the whole length of that court [...]. We understood that it was the dining hall of the King and his companions.'

⁵⁹ SIRAGUSA (1897), pp. 177–78. LOUD/WIEDEMANN, p. 258–59. See appendix.

⁶⁰ IBN JUBAYR (2003), pp. 346–47.

According to Thomas Dittelbach, the dining hall of the Norman king, described here, would have been located on the first floor of the Joharia tower, between the kings' private chambers and the Cappella Palatina (Fig. 44).⁶¹ Apart from indicating that not only courtiers had access to the royal palace, Ibn Jubayr's account shows that Muslim travellers were allowed there too.⁶² Might they have been shown the royal garments? Could they have noticed and possibly read the Arabic inscriptions?

It is very probable that the royal garments – given their great material and symbolic value – were kept in the treasury of the Norman kings. As is suggested in the sources, treasuries did not only contain garments and objects made of precious materials, but also served as the repositories for legal documents, which appear to have been considered in need of guarding.⁶³ Royal treasuries and their contents played an important role in the symbolic apparatus of political authority. In fact, various sources testify that changes in rule traditionally went hand in hand with taking possession of the previous king's treasury and the regalia contained in it.⁶⁴ In the case of Sicily, we have evidence that Emperor Henry VI, in conformity with this tradition, ordered the handing over of the Norman regalia once he had victoriously entered the city of Palermo in 1194.⁶⁵

In his study of medieval treasuries, Matthias Hardt suggested that royal treasuries should be imagined as spaces which could occasionally be made public. Mentioning the example of the Visigoth King Theoderich II, who was accustomed to tour both the treasury and the stables after his daily public audience, Hardt thinks it highly probable that this visit – perfectly suited for a display of royal wealth and authority – would have occurred in the presence of legates to the court.⁶⁶ This and most of Hardt's other examples are very early in time, being based on a wide-ranging analysis of early

61 Thomas DITTELBACH, *The Ruler's Throne: Topology and Utopia*, in: id. (ed.), *Die Cappella Palatina in Palermo: Geschichte, Kunst, Funktion: Forschungsergebnisse der Restaurierung*, Künzelsau 2011, p. 535.

62 Access to the palace was not always peaceful. This is shown, for instance, in Alex Metcalfe's analysis of medieval sources on the plundering of the Norman palace under William I (in the 1160s). METCALFE (2009), p. 185.

63 The tax register of Tours was kept in the treasury of the Merovingian King Childebert II. See HARDT (2004), pp. 131–32. For Norman Sicily, on the other hand, Falcandus' account of the uprising of 1160 and the sack of the Norman palace suggests that the administrative documents were also kept inside the Norman palace, although it is uncertain whether the documents were in the treasury. See METCALFE (2009), pp. 185–89.

64 Before he died in 1218, Otto IV ordered that the imperial regalia should be handed over to whoever was rightfully chosen by the dukes, i.e. Frederick II. See Claudia LYDORF, 'Wem nützt es, dass wir über mein Leben verhandeln, da es keines mehr ist?': Testament und Tod Kaiser Ottos IV, in: Andreas W. VETTER et al. (eds), *Otto IV.: Traum vom welfischen Kaisertum* (Braunschweig, Landesmuseum, 2009), Petersberg 2009, p. 284. See also HARDT (2004), p. 32.

65 ERTL (2003), p. 285.

66 HARDT (2004), p. 218.

medieval written sources preceding the eleventh century. However, thinking of such procedures at medieval Latin courts is, of course, also relevant for determining who would have read the Norman textile inscriptions. Although we have no similarly specific evidence for such visits in Norman Sicily, the written sources mentioned so far suggest that visitors would have been allowed inside the royal palace, where they could see the textile workshop and – possibly – the treasury.⁶⁷

Visiting the treasury would have allowed for a much closer inspection of the objects than would ever have been possible during official ceremonies. It is also possible that individual pieces from the treasury would have been shown and explained in more detail, both to the kings themselves and to visitors, as seems to have been the case in Fatimid Egypt. As shown in the previous chapter, the historian al-Maqrīzī describes this type of guided viewing of a ruler's garments. He tells how the Fatimid court commissioned garments and how, upon their completion, the textiles were then brought to the caliph and shown one by one.⁶⁸ Attention was given to each of the individual pieces of attire intended to be worn by the caliph. Not only the materials and workmanship would have been praised in the *ṣāhib*'s presentation to the caliph and his courtiers, but details of the iconography may have been explained and inscriptions read out. The Fatimid caliphs themselves seem to have taken a personal interest in the production of the garments.

Of course, we can only speculate on this matter. Nevertheless, it is probable that inscriptions on objects shown to those individuals privileged enough to enter the treasury – including the Norman kings – would potentially have been appreciated for both their form and material splendour and also for their linguistic content. It is thus very plausible that the inscriptions were seen, read, recited or read aloud when the garments were not worn. The likely viewers would have consisted of the Norman kings themselves, their courtiers, and other occasional visitors, including diplomatic delegations and foreigners.

3.2 Textile Inscriptions and Royal Ceremonies

The most obvious setting in which the Norman garments ought to be imagined is royal ceremony, where textiles would often have played an extremely important role.⁶⁹ Written sources containing accounts of near contemporary Byzantine and Fatimid

⁶⁷ Among the possible 'elite visitors to the Norman court', Johns includes Fatimid diplomats and leaders of the island's Muslim community. Jeremy JOHNS, *Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina: Performativity, Audience, Legibility and Illegibility*, in: EASTMOND (2015), pp. 135–36.

⁶⁸ SERJEANT (1972), p. 152. Conf. Chapter 2.2.

⁶⁹ Gerd ALTHOFF, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*, Darmstadt 2003; Rosemary MORRIS, *Beyond the De Ceremoniis*, in: Catherine CUBITT (ed.), *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2003, pp. 235–54.

ceremonies, for example, offer an insight into how they were used for the *mise en scène* of royalty, adorning palaces and subtly indicating social hierarchies through colour codes and materials.⁷⁰ At the Byzantine and Fatimid courts, textiles appear to have been used to impress foreign embassies, symbolise social hierarchy, and create sophisticated scenarios oscillating between visibility and veiling, thus playing with the expectations of the viewers and enhancing the aura of the ruler.⁷¹

Only very little, however, is known about the actual ceremonies which took place at the Norman court. Some information can be gleaned from the *ordo* for solemn coronations mentioned previously. A 'solemn coronation' is not the actual constitutional act of the king's coronation, but rather a ceremony which takes place on high feast days or on official occasions during which the ruler makes a public appearance accompanied by his retinue and vested with the full insignia of his office.⁷² While it is unclear whether this *ordo* was ever applied as such in practice,⁷³ it is nevertheless relevant here since it describes the ideal procedure – from the point of view of the contemporary clergy – and how the ceremony would have unfolded in the urban space of Palermo.

The *ordo* prescribes, for example, that the king should leave the royal palace in a procession towards the cathedral (Fig. 68), where he was to be dressed, endowed with his regalia and crowned by the bishop or archbishop in a ceremony, which would have been accompanied by specific prayers, psalms and lauds.⁷⁴ The end of the ceremony would have been marked by another procession, back to the palace, before which the king would have exchanged his ceremonial garments for 'lighter ones' in order to take a festive meal in the company of the Sicilian magnates.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Marius CANARD, La procession du nouvel an chez les Fatimides, in: *Annales de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales* 10 (1952), pp. 364–98. CANARD (1951).

⁷¹ SHALEM (2006).

⁷² Carlrichard BRÜHL, Kronen- und Königsbrauch im frühen und hohen Mittelalter, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 234 (1982), pp. 1–31.

⁷³ As Thomas Ertl points out, these *ordines* always ought to be considered as proposals; they do not constitute normative texts. Furthermore, the ideas of the clergy which are laid out in these liturgical texts did not always correspond to the ideas of the king and his advisors. See ERTL (2003), p. 289.

⁷⁴ '[...] In cappis (sericis) [iam] indutis omnibus, vestimenta regalia presententur regi per manus episcoporum seu archiepiscoporum qui aderunt et interim mittatus pro processione archiepiscopii, ut veniat sicut subter adnexu est, et cantent[ur] psalmi, donec veniat: [list of psalms to be sung]. Post hec veniat processio ab ecclesia cum sancta cruce, cum diademate et sceptro et regno hoc ordine, ut ferentes crucem sanctam precedent eos, qui ferunt regalia insignia, scilicet diadema, sceptrum et regnum. Et (qui fert) [ferens] diadema eat post crucem, a dextris cuius erit ferens regnum, a sinistris qui feret sceptrum. Et archiepiscopus qui missam cantabit post eos ibit. [...] postea accipiat coronam ambabus minibus suis et imponat capiti regis [...]' Reinhard ELZE, Der normannische Festkrönungsordo aus Sizilien, in: CUOZZO/MARTIN (1998), p. 323.

⁷⁵ ELZE (1998), p. 326. 'Finita missa cum tota processione sicut de thalamo discessit cum sancta cruce et eodem ordine (redeat) [redibit] ad thalamum [vestiarii canente clero Salve festa dies. Et ibi rex (mutet) [mutabit] insignia et leviora (induat vestimenta) [induet indumenta]. Hoc facto (redeat) [redibit] rex (ad



Fig. 68: Royal palace and cathedral, detail from a 16th-c. map of Palermo.

Aside from royal representation inside the palace, we must imagine, therefore, that public royal ceremony would probably have been played out regularly on the axis between the Norman palace and the cathedral. The Chiesa dell’Incoronata, moreover, with its open portico near the west entrance of the cathedral, appears to have been built for ceremonial purposes shortly before Roger II’s coronation in 1130 (Fig. 69).⁷⁶ The church has been heavily remodelled over the centuries, but its colonnaded portico is original – it seems to have been intended as a space in which the kings could be acclaimed. The foundations of this chapel appear to have been laid over those of the former great mosque of the city (Fig. 70),⁷⁷ which makes this chapel a Norman ceremonial space endowed with a distinctive symbolic value of Norman Christian religious and political triumph.

An impression of how Norman ceremonies may have been perceived by onlookers can be gained from the historiographer Alexander of Telesse’s account of Roger II’s coronation, on Christmas Day 1130:⁷⁸

‘[O]ne cannot write down nor indeed even imagine quite how glorious he was, how regal in his dignity, how splendid in his richly-adorned apparel. For it seemed to the onlookers that all the riches and honours of this world were present. The whole city was decorated in a stupendous manner, and nowhere was there anything but rejoicing and light. The royal palace was on its interior walls gloriously draped throughout. The pavement was bestrewed with multi-coloured carpets and showed a flowing softness to the feet of those who trod there. When the king went to the church for the ceremony he was surrounded by dignitaries, and the huge number of horses which accompanied them had saddles and bridles decorated with gold and silver. Large amounts

palacium) [...] Postea sedeant archiepiscopi et episcopi et comites reddant gladios et sedeant, et cum regi placuerit ibunt ad palacium, ubi comedere debeant [...].’

⁷⁶ Lucie HAGENDORF-NUSSBAUM, *Westsizilianische Kuppelkirchen der Normannenzeit*, Cologne 1999, pp. 83–84.

⁷⁷ According to the archaeological evidence, this mosque can be related to the 9th c. architecture of Aghlabid Tunisia. Giuseppe BELLAFFIORE, *Architettura in Sicilia nelle età islamica e normanna 827–1194* (La Civiltà Siciliana: Storia dell’Arte in Sicilia 1), Palermo 1990, p. 23.

⁷⁸ Translation of Abbot Alexander of Telesse’s ‘History of the Most Serene Roger, first King of Sicily’ in Graham LOUD, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, Manchester 2012, p. 79.



Fig. 69: Loggia dell'Incoronazione, 12th c., Palermo.

of the choicest food and drink were served to the diners at the royal table, and nothing was served except in dishes or cups of gold or silver. There was no servant there who did not wear a silk tunic – the very waiters were clad in silk clothes!’

It seems, therefore, that the king would have been closely surrounded by a multitude of clergy, courtiers and magnates of the kingdom during ceremonies. Moreover, the fact that the king’s sumptuous processions from one venue to the other led through the public space of the city strongly suggests that the people of Palermo would have been a further category of viewers.

People who saw the ceremony from afar but could not approach the king would probably only have been able to catch a glimpse of the materials, colour and texture of his garments, if anything. Furthermore, given the explicit mention of the fact that the king changed into ‘lighter’ garments for the procession back to the palace, it is unlikely that the Palermitan people would ever have seen garments such as Roger II’s mantle, which must have been excessively heavy.⁷⁹ So during the ceremonies there would have been a clear hierarchy between the different viewers of the royal garments, headed by the king himself and those members of the royal entourage and clergy who would have been allowed to be in close enough proximity to the ruler to be considered potential readers of the textile inscriptions.

One last, important point relates to the coronation *ordo*. According to this document, there was a moment during the ceremony during which the king was seated on the throne. Here, he would have been approached, first, by the bishop and archbishop, who were required to incline and kiss the king, and then by all magnates present, including dukes, princes, counts and noblemen of lesser rank, who also had

⁷⁹ According to Grabar, the mantle weighs over 50 kg. GRABAR (2005), p. 34.

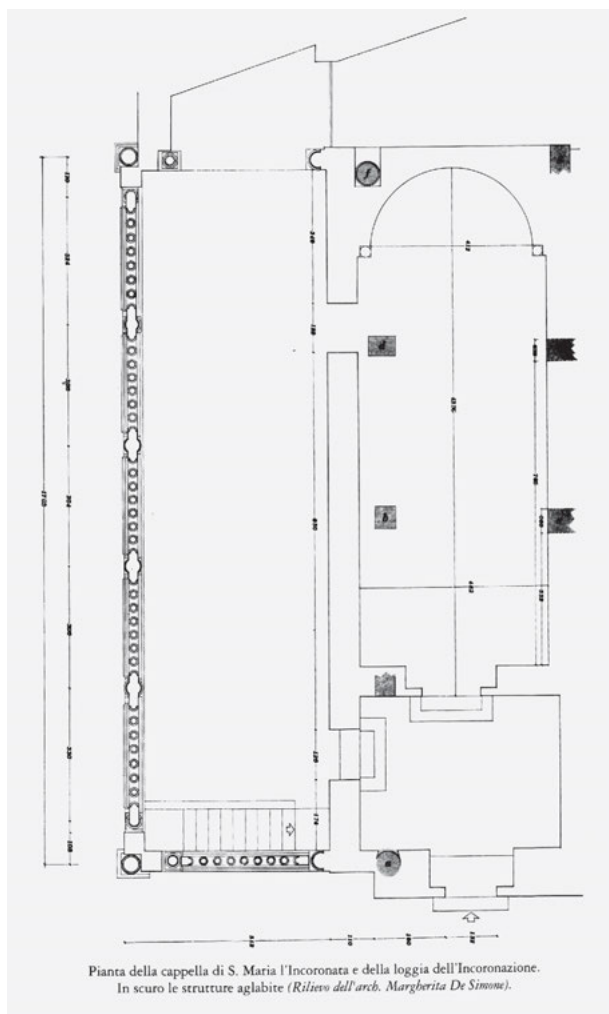


Fig. 70: Groundplan Chiesa dell'Incoronata, Palermo. Aghlabid architectural remains in dark grey.

to incline and kiss the king's feet.⁸⁰ In this case, the inscriptions' position right above the floor would have helped their legibility: those located on the hems of garments – on the mantle and alb, for example – would have been visible at a close range. It is likely, moreover, that some of these individuals would have been literate enough at

⁸⁰ *'In throno autem sedeant a dextris et a sinistris regis archiepiscopi et episcopi pro custodiendo eo, sicut ei placuerit. Et primo die pasche postquam rex sederit, antequam sedeant archiepiscopi et episcopi, humiliter inclinent et osculentur regem. Postea sedeant. Deinde dux (princeps) [principes] comites magnates osculentur pedes regis.'* Elze (1998), p. 325. Kissing hands and feet was also common practice in contemporary Fatimid and Byzantine ceremonies. See CANARD (1951), pp. 380 and 385.

least to recognise a few words, or distinguish between the different languages of the writing on the alb.

4 Visible or Invisible – Legible or Illegible?

‘Calligraphy not only subjects the texts to the specific intentions of the scribe, but also requires increased attention from its viewer. The aim is not necessarily readability, but the form of the text is attributed so much weight that its content becomes meaningful from the very outset.’⁸¹

The Sicilian textiles carry inscriptions which are actually legible and not merely ornamental pseudo-scripts. It is, nevertheless, unlikely that more than a few learned readers in Norman Sicily would have been able to decipher such inscriptions. At the time of the production of the Norman garments in the second half of the twelfth century, literacy was low, and was usually limited to church and court officials.⁸² Besides the issues of language and literacy, the extremely small size of most of these inscriptions and the degree of their ornamentalisation would have been a further obstacle to their intelligibility. We therefore need to investigate the different dimensions of this type of ornament, which oscillates between seeing and reading, visibility and language.⁸³ These complementary facets of written ornament ought to be correlated with the different stages of its production and reception: they address different audiences and fulfil different functions.⁸⁴ The message conveyed by the quotation above is an important one: the meaning of an inscription does not necessarily derive from its linguistic content alone – visibility and materiality are important factors to take into account.⁸⁵

81 ‘Kalligraphie setzt die Texte nicht nur besonderen Intentionen des Schreibers aus, sondern verlangt auch höhere Aufmerksamkeit beim Betrachter. Auch hier ist die Lesbarkeit nicht unbedingtes Ziel, aber der äußeren Gestalt des Textes wird so viel Gewicht verliehen, dass sein Inhalt von vorneherein bedeutsam wird.’ Claus-Peter HAASE, Arabische Kalligraphie auf Textilien, in: FLUCK/HELMECKE (2006), p. 16.

82 James Westfall THOMPSON, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages*, Berkeley 1939. On Arabic in medieval and early modern Europe, see, for example, Karl DANNENFELDT, *The Renaissance Humanists and the Knowledge of Arabic*, in: *Studies in the Renaissance* 2 (1955), pp. 96–117.

83 For an excellent introduction to ‘*Schriftbildlichkeit*’, see Barbara SCHELLEWALD, *Introduction: Bild und Text im Mittelalter*, in: Karin KRAUSE and Barbara SCHELLEWALD (eds), *Bild und Text im Mittelalter*, Vienna 2011, pp. 11–21.

84 On functions of inscriptions on medieval Latin artefacts, see also Susanne WITTEKIND, *Eingeschrieben ins ewige Gedächtnis: Überlegungen zur Funktion von Schriftverwendung an mittelalterlichen Kunstwerken*, in: Dietrich BOSCHUNG and Hansgerd HELLENKEMPER (eds), *Kosmos der Zeichen. Schriftbild und Bildformel in Antike und Mittelalter*, Wiesbaden 2007, pp. 187–210.

85 ‘[...] Inscriptions are not just disembodied words that can be studied in isolation. Instead, they must be considered as material entities, whose meaning is determined as much by their physical qualities as by their contents.’ ‘Meaning is further developed by the relationship between the texts

Different degrees of visibility and their intentional uses in the visual expression of authority are issues to be addressed not only with reference to inscriptions or garments but also to the whole body of the medieval ruler. Avinoam Shalem's article on 'manipulations of seeing' is of particular relevance here.⁸⁶ Shalem focuses on instances of 'not-seeing' as described especially in a literary source from the eleventh century contained in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*,⁸⁷ and different types of 'partial seeing'. The types of partial seeing include hardly seeing, confronting a blurred or uncertain image, and being dazzled or temporarily deprived of sight, as well as seeing something too quickly. All of these types can be considered strategies consciously used, Shalem argues, as visual effects to convey a sense of the mysterious power of the caliph.

The garment of a king or caliph, such as Roger II's mantle, could be considered part of the elements used to veil the body of the king, while embellishing him with a costly material and conferring ceremonial power and authority upon him. Furthermore, Roger's mantle itself is also subjected to the rules of partial visibility, a fact which Shalem remarks upon particularly in terms of its gold-woven lining with figures – no one could ever have caught more than few glimpses of this when the king moved. The glimpses of these 'magical' textiles may have been intended to 'endow the ruler with a mysterious, even supernatural aura',⁸⁸ and the same process of seeing and non-seeing, the same oscillation between legibility and invisibility – as well as various modes of viewing by different audiences and in varying circumstances – ought to be taken into account when analysing the function of the Norman garments' ornamental inscriptions.

4.1 The Mantle: Kufic Clarity

It may seem odd to begin a reflection on the different forms of visibility and legibility with the long Kufic inscription embroidered on the hem of Roger II's mantle, which is in fact legible and extraordinarily clear. The letters are laid out regularly, occupying and structuring the entirety of the space around the hem, and they are very plain, with the exception of a few discrete embellishments, such as prolonged letter shafts with tooth-shaped terminals, intertwined *lamalifs*, or the few floral renderings

and their physical contexts. The layout and sequencing of texts can affect how viewers interact with the buildings or landscapes in which they are located.' Anthony EASTMOND, Introduction, in: id. (2015), pp. 2–3.

⁸⁶ Avinoam SHALEM, Manipulations of Seeing and Visual Strategies in the Audience Halls of the Early Islamic Period: Preliminary Notes, in: Franz Alto BAUER (ed.), *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen: Gestalt und Zeremoniell* (Byzas 5), Istanbul 2006, pp. 213–32.

⁸⁷ AL-QADDUMI (1996).

⁸⁸ SHALEM (2006), p. 228.

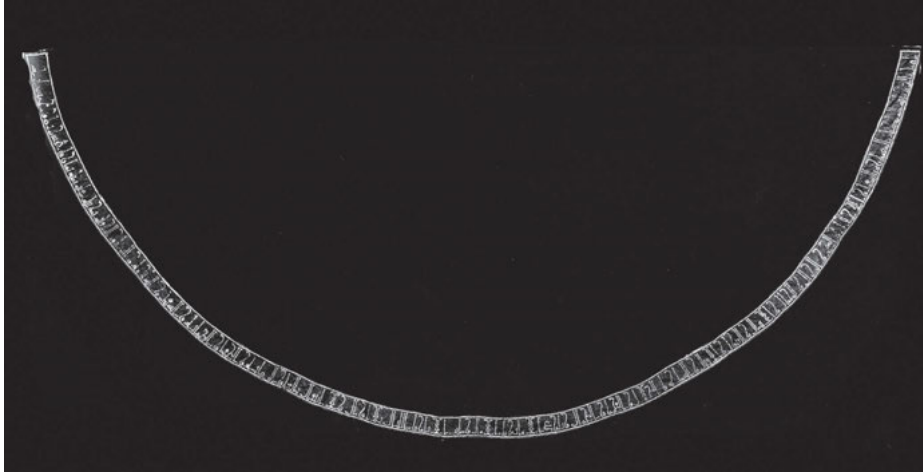


Fig. 71: Detail of the inscription on Roger II's mantle.

of diacritical marks (Fig. 71). This is all the more surprising because, as seen previously, Roger II's mantle was produced at a time long after Sicily's Arab neighbours had introduced heavily floriated types of Kufic.⁸⁹ The inscription on the mantle has to be considered somewhat archaic in style, but is much more legible for being so. It is very probable, therefore, that at the moment of its production, the content of the inscription was attributed just as much importance as its form. Nevertheless, besides the fact that the mantle was very soon removed from its place of origin in Sicily and came to be used as the coronation mantle of the Holy Roman Empire, where there was no Arabic tradition, both the relatively small width (6 cm) and the position of the inscription at the very bottom of the mantle would have acted as obstacles to its readability and visibility, even in Norman Sicily, where we may presuppose a familiarity with Arabic forms.

The display position of the textile in the museum, which shows the mantle almost like a painting, flat up against the back of the slightly inclined display case, is entirely artificial (Fig. 1). Assuming that the mantle was actually worn, the tree would have been visible at the centre of the king's back, and the heads of the animals and patterns of precious pearls and enamel at the front. The inscription would have been moving and obscured by the folds of the garment; it would probably have been visible only on either side of the vertical axis formed by the back of the wearer at the front.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ BLAIR (1999); GROHMANN (1957).

⁹⁰ It is unlikely that the mantle may have been worn asymmetrically, in Byzantine fashion, covering only one shoulder. The rigidly symmetrical layout of the ornamental scheme appears most suited to

This would have left the viewers with the factual information on the production of the mantle visible at the front. This is: *mimmā ‘umila bi-l-khizānat al-malakiya al-ma‘mūra* (of what was made in the plentiful royal *khizāna*); and on the other side: *bi-madīnat Ṣiqillīya sana thamān wa-‘ishrīn wa-khamsmi’a* (in the city of Sicily, in the year 528 AH). The central part of the inscription, on the other hand, would have been visible on the king’s back. This would have been recognisable to educated viewers as a part of a specific type of rhymed prose, called *saj’*.⁹¹ In fact, the prominent position on the mantle of this particular passage suggests that the form and linguistic content of the inscription ought to be complemented by sound, which will be addressed below, as a further aesthetic dimension to be taken into account in the reception of the mantle’s inscription.

4.2 The Alb: Illegible?

The alb is also embroidered with inscriptions that are legible in theory, but are decipherable in practice only with considerable difficulty, mainly because of their size and their position on the garment (Fig. 72). As with the inscription of the mantle, the pairs of Latin and Arabic inscriptions repeated twice on each of the four embroidered parts of the hem of the alb would be located very close to the ground when the garment was worn. Besides their position, however, the major obstacle to the legibility and even the visibility of the alb inscriptions is the minute size of the letters. The Latin inscriptions occupy a band 0.8 cm wide, while the much longer Arabic part in cursive Thuluth script is crammed into a band 2.5 cm wide. The Arabic words have been superimposed in many places and the few remaining blank spaces between the letters filled with ornamental scrolls. It is therefore extremely difficult to read the Arabic parts of the bilingual inscription, although its wording is clearly of political relevance, mentioning not only the territorial claims of William II, but also his close ties with the Pope and his function as the ‘protector of Christendom’.⁹²

The Latin, on the other hand, is not only shorter, but also highly abbreviated. In fact, not even the name of the ruler is written out fully, but merely rendered with the king’s initial, ‘W’.⁹³ While the abbreviations are an obstacle to reading the inscription, their appearance also suggests that the Latin part must have been based on a highly standardised formula. In fact, the content of the alb inscriptions must have

the shape of the mantle when it is worn on both shoulders. Moreover, later uses of the mantle have shown that it was worn symmetrically. See GRABAR (2005), pp. 33–34.

⁹¹ Conf. Chapter 1, 1.1.

⁹² ‘Mu’izz ‘imām R(ū)miya, al-nāṣir li-l-millat al-naṣrāniya.’

⁹³ On the preeminence of titles above names, stressing the political power rather than the (interchangeable) persona of the ruler, see ERTL (2003), pp. 270–73.



Fig. 72: Detail of the hem of the alb.

been familiar through its consistent use on legal documents. So, although the craftsman, or the patron responsible for the production of the alb's orphrey, seems to have attributed much importance to the legibility of the inscriptions, they are so small and difficult to decipher that – if anything – only the visual juxtaposition of the two forms of writing would have been perceived when the alb was worn.

A further cause of the relative illegibility of the alb's inscriptions is the fact that one of the four pieces forming the hem, on the front right, is turned upside down. It is not clear whether this piece was deliberately reversed from the outset or whether the reversal was accidental (it may have occurred when the textiles of the alb were reassembled or restored).⁹⁴ The reception of the alb in both written sources and visual documentation across the centuries does little to clarify this. There is no pertinent written information about the appearance of the alb until it was reworked in Nuremberg in the early sixteenth century, for the occasion of Charles V's coronation.⁹⁵ The reversal may have occurred at any time between the alb's production and its restoration in the sixteenth century. None of the pieces of the hem on the copy of the alb, commissioned in 1764 by Francis I of Lorraine, are reversed (Fig. 37). This suggests that the reversal may have occurred at a later date. However, two later illustrated publications of the alb show conflicting evidence of the state of the hem: it is reversed in Delsenbach's illustration published in 1790 (Fig. 32) and the right way up in Bock's publication of 1864.⁹⁶

It is, however, difficult to believe that the reversal, which is observable in the present state of the alb, may have been accidental at any stage in the alb's history,

⁹⁴ Rotraud Bauer had suggested that the cut of the embroidered piece of silk only allows for it to be sewn into the hem upside-down. SCHWINGER (2004), p. 106, note 21. This opinion is disputed by Katja Schmitz von Ledebur, who inspected the alb and kindly informed me that the piece could probably have been sewn on either way.

⁹⁵ BAUER (2004), p. 91.

⁹⁶ SCHWINGER (2004), pp. 102–03; BOCK (1864); DELSENBACH (1790).

especially because not only the script but also the figural pattern is reversed, and because the continuity of the lines of pearls is very clearly interrupted (Fig. 72). In fact, reversed inscriptions, both mirror reversed and upside down, are no rarity in medieval Islamic textiles, often being occasioned by the technical constraints of the loom when the inscriptions were woven.⁹⁷ The technical knowledge necessary to set up a draw-loom was considerable.⁹⁸ Considering the repetitiveness of the patterns and inscriptions on the embroidered pieces of the alb's hem as well as the reversal, it is conceivable that the craftsmen desired to imitate the prestigious aesthetics of weaving. As a secondary effect, the reversal may have had an impact on how the inscriptions would have been viewed. In fact, it is imaginable that the text – legible only from above – was explicitly addressed to the wearer of the alb, whereas the other parts of the inscription may have aimed at onlookers during ceremonies. Such a pre-occupation with audiences and their perception of the insignia of authority is seen in seal-rings contemporary with the Norman textiles which were worn upside down so that they could be viewed the right way up by onlookers.⁹⁹

4.3 The Stockings: Ornamental Entanglements

The precious ceremonial silk stockings provide yet another example of the types of illegibility of the Arabic inscriptions on the Norman royal garments. Although the inscribed tapestry bands at the top of the stockings (c. 9 cm wide) are slightly larger than those on the alb, they were probably entirely invisible when the stockings were worn. They would have been hidden underneath several layers of other garments, including an alb. A further hindrance to deciphering the woven letters is the fact that the spaces between them have been filled with vegetal ornament, the scrolls of which, executed in the same colour as the writing (Fig. 73), surround and overlap the letters.

Of course, the different periods of the reception of the inscriptions, ranging from the moment of their creation under William II, to their possible use by Frederick II and their subsequent reuses in the following centuries, when the stockings formed part of the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire, should not be confused. It seems, however, that in the case of the stockings, reading the inscriptions played only a minor role, probably secondary to the decorative function of the inscribed bands and to their memorial or perhaps even amuletic function as 'textile spolia' from previous rulers – both functions will be examined in more detail in the following two chapters.

⁹⁷ A relationship is suggested, for example, by Sheila Blair. BLAIR (1997), p. 96.

⁹⁸ BELLINGER/KÜHNEL (1952), p. 101.

⁹⁹ I would like to thank Birgitt Borkopp-Restle for pointing this out to me.



Fig. 73: Tapestry-woven inscription on the right stocking in mirror-reverse.

The above-noted attachment of the stockings' inscribed bands inside out,¹⁰⁰ which heavily compromises their inscriptions' legibility, goes entirely unmentioned in the Viennese catalogue of the *Nobiles Officinae* exhibition from 2004 and by Al-Samman, who seems to have actually read the inscriptions when the tapestry-woven bands were detached for conservation. While it is probable that whoever was responsible for the reversal could not read Arabic and chose to reverse the band because the previously lesser-exposed side of the textile was better preserved, the confusion may well have arisen also because of the relative illegibility of the inscriptions occasioned by the entanglement of inscriptions and vegetal ornament. This has – in part – been attributed to the weavers' presumed lack of familiarity with the Arabic language.¹⁰¹ However, given that the colour scheme of the vegetal scrolls and the inscriptions is the same (gold with red and white outlines), the blurring of writing and ornament may well have been intended from the outset. It is extremely hard to distinguish between ornament and writing even from a short distance, which suggests that the inscriptions were not necessarily meant to be read – and certainly not from afar.

4.4 Frederick II's Funerary Alb: The Status of the Written Word

The most self-explanatory type of illegibility encountered in relation to Arabic textile inscriptions from medieval Sicily is their complete invisibility when used for funerary purposes. In contrast to William II's alb, the one in which Frederick II was laid to rest is inscribed on the cuffs, not on the hem (Fig. 74). It is, of course, possible that it was not specially made for this purpose but taken from an existing stock of garments in

¹⁰⁰ Von Murr had noticed the reversal, indicating that it predates 1790. '*Die Schrift muß umgekehrt gelesen werden. Denn der Schneider hat das, was außen stehen sollte, einwärts genähet.*' VON MURR (1790), p. 45.

¹⁰¹ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 26.



Fig. 74: Sarcophagus of Frederick II.

the royal wardrobe, so that the inscriptions may not originally have been intended to adorn a funerary garment.¹⁰² Framing the hands of a living king, the inscriptions on the sleeves would probably have been perceived to enhance gestures of authority, as is known from contemporary Fatimid-Coptic Egypt,¹⁰³ where the use of Arabic inscriptions, as Jacques van der Vliet has pointed out, had a socially distinctive function.¹⁰⁴ Text established an intellectual link between the owner of the written word – in this case the wearer – and the reader, or viewer. In addition to their linguistic message, inscriptions – even pseudo-script that could be mistaken for script from a distance or by someone unable to read – thus articulated social status.¹⁰⁵ The occurrence of an inscription on a king's sleeve, whether it was read or not, may thus be considered the result of a choice aimed at the enhancement of royal authority.

However, while the initial choice underlying the use of inscriptions on Frederick II's cuffs remains relevant for the moment of their production, the inscriptions are stripped of one of their signifying layers – their reception – through the subsequent use of the garment in the funerary context. Once the burial ceremony is accomplished and once the memory of those present at the ceremony vanishes, there is no longer an

¹⁰² There is ample evidence from other European contexts that used garments served as funerary robes. See BORKOPP-RESTLE/SHELLEWALD (2011).

¹⁰³ On hands and sleeves in contemporary Fatimid ceremonies, see CANARD (1951), p. 384: *'D'ordinaire le calife, lorsqu'il répond au salut du vizir, le fait simplement, soit en agitant sa manche, soit par un simple signe. Lorsque, lors des cérémonies des Anniversaires (maulid) ou des Nuits d'illumination (layālī al-wuqūd), le cortège conduit par le Grand Cadi vient saluer le calife sous un des belvédères du palais (manžara), le calife montre sa tête à une des fenêtres, entouré de ses eunuques; l'un de ceux-ci ouvre une autre fenêtre, passe la tête par l'ouverture et, faisant un signe avec la main droite recouverte par la manche, dit: "L'Émir des Croyants vous rend votre salut."*

¹⁰⁴ VAN DER VLIET (2006), p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

‘interaction’ between the wearer and the reader.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the inscriptions slip from occasional visibility on the living king to an invisible presence on the deceased king; this use of inscriptions is also common to Fatimid Egypt and suggests – as was shown in the preceding chapter – that inscribed textiles could have a protective function.

4.5 An Ornament of Various Aesthetic Dimensions

Before passing on to sound, an additional aesthetic layer of the Arabic inscriptions of Norman Sicily that is relevant to their reception, I would like to summarise briefly what emerges from this overview of the visibility and legibility of the Norman textile inscriptions. As shown above, the inscriptions on the Norman garments appear to have been largely illegible, not only in the later reception of the garments, but also in the context of the Norman court itself. This is for various reasons, ranging from their position on the garments and size, to the circumstances of their use as ceremonial or funerary textiles, for example. So it seems that the textile inscriptions were meant to be seen, but not necessarily always meant to be read. Their form would probably have been recognised as an ornament with a special status, possibly associated with a larger community of Mediterranean elites, but the wording would have remained unknown to most viewers. Can we conclude then, returning to the previously discussed concept of a shared courtly aesthetic in the medieval Mediterranean, that the Arabic script on the Norman garments is to be considered an ornament appreciated for its decorative qualities only, as a form essentially devoid of meaning?

In the case of the Norman textile inscriptions, the answer is no. The inscriptions were conceived for the garments, embroidered or woven with great care in extremely precious materials – silk and gold – and, most importantly, they adorn the garments of a king, which suggests that they would have been attributed a specific function in royal representation. Another important argument against the assumption of a merely formal transfer is the fact that the wording of the inscriptions is meaningful. Real inscriptions, rather than pseudo-script, were used on the royal garments, providing a strong argument that the linguistic content of these inscriptions must have been deemed important. However, the inscriptions may well have been aimed at different audiences and types of viewing from the outset. Moreover, the instances of illegibility shown above effectively underline the different aesthetic dimensions of the ornamental inscriptions; these range from the viewers’ appreciation of the material of the precious embroidery or weaving and the form of the letter shapes, to the actual content of the inscriptions and their sound.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Through the action of being read, inscriptions establish a link between a literate beholder and a literate owner or donor. In addition to a process of intellectual interaction, the written text initiates a process of social interaction.’ Ibid.

5 Inscriptions as Sound

Sound is an aesthetic category which presents art historians with a set of distinct problems arising from its immateriality. The acoustic dimension of ornamental inscriptions is an issue which seems to have entered scholarly considerations only very recently and – to my knowledge – has not been discussed for textile inscriptions. ‘Speaking objects’, which address their viewers in the first person, have attracted some attention; they are, however, extremely rare, and the emphasis is seldom laid on the sound of their inscriptions.¹⁰⁷ ‘Speaking’ monumental inscriptions are more numerous and can be found all over the Mediterranean and in different languages. Specific mention should be made, for example, of the inscriptions of the Norman pleasure palaces Zisa and Cuba, in Palermo, which both address their viewers. Moreover, Johns’ recent article on royal performance and the inscriptions on the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina also suggests that these inscriptions may have to be considered as material markers of the litanies that were sung in the chapel. He does not, however, provide more source material to support this very interesting thesis.¹⁰⁸

Two recent studies of monumental inscriptions on churches in medieval Byzantium have proposed investigating their acoustic dimension too, concluding that ‘orality’, as well as the readers’ – or reciting viewer’s – movement through space, must have been consciously taken into account at the stage of the conception of the inscriptions.¹⁰⁹ Although we cannot assume that inscriptions were always read aloud or recited, nor that orality would always have had a function during the conception of an inscription, sound remains an essential component. Two examples among the inscribed royal garments, in particular, provide strong evidence that sound must be considered an important complementary aesthetic dimension essential for the reception of the garments in Norman Sicily: the ceremonial belt – inscribed in Latin – and Roger II’s mantle.

5.1 Word and Ceremony: The Sword Belt

The woven inscription on the belt is far simpler than the Arabic ones discussed above. It consists of only a few words. Although the inscription is in Latin, not in Arabic, as the carrier of the royal sword, the belt was an essential component of Norman regalia

¹⁰⁷ SHALEM (2010); ROSENTHAL (1971); BURZACECHI (1962).

¹⁰⁸ JOHNS (2015).

¹⁰⁹ LIZ JAMES, ‘And Shall these Mute Stones Speak?’: Text as Art, in: ead. (ed.), *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 188–206; AMY PAPALEXANDROU, *Echoes of Orality in the Monumental Inscriptions of Byzantium*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 161–87.



Fig. 75: Sword belt (illustration in Delsenbach 1790).

and ought to be included in this study. The relationship between the form and the acoustic dimension of the belt's inscription is particularly pronounced.

As with the inscriptions on the garments discussed previously, the one here would probably have been almost invisible and certainly unreadable when the belt was worn. The letters are tiny, measuring less than a centimetre in height. They are very widely spaced so that they occupy the entire belt, making it unlikely that any one word would have been clearly legible in its entirety (Fig. 75). The inscription – in garbled Latin – reads: 'CRISTUS RIEGNAT INQPARAT DEUS'. The formula '*Christus regnat! Christus imperat! Christus vincit!*', from which this inscription derives, is the liturgical laud of Latin rite, sung following royal coronations.¹¹⁰

The twelfth-century coronation *ordo* preserved in two manuscripts from Sicily or southern Italy states that the liturgical ceremony in Norman Sicily would have included exactly these three acclamations, sung before the act of coronation in the church.¹¹¹ The inscription on the belt may thus be read as a visual expression of the spoken liturgical act and as a written document which could subsequently function as a visual reminder of the occasion at which the act was performed. The words on the belt symbolically envelop the body of its wearer, and carry the sword – the sign of office – so that the constitutional confirmation of the authority and legitimacy of the king is echoed both visually and orally through the inscription.

¹¹⁰ The music of the laudes was analysed by Manfred F. Bukofzer, whose study can be found as an appendix to Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship*, Berkeley 1958, pp. 189–244. The formula is found also on medieval objects of art and devotion unrelated to coronation ceremonies. Its apotropaic function has been underlined notably by Kantorowicz. In: *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Elze (1998), p. 325. The coronation *ordo* may not have been put into practice in this form, but it certainly represents an ideal to be approximated. Elze suggests that the *ordo* may have been written when Roger II asked for the *consuetudines* of all peoples to be drawn up. But there is only one occasion at which a solemn coronation may have taken place for the Norman rulers – William I's coronation by Pope Hadrian IV in Benevento (Easter 1156).

5.2 Word as Sound on the Mantle

The mantle's inscription, on the other hand, has a literary form which has been previously identified as *saj'*.¹¹² *Saj'* prose consists of rhythmically structured parts of speech that are connected through rhymes and is intended to be recited aloud and before an audience.¹¹³ The use of this form is common in Arabic and can be traced back to pre-Islamic times, when it was used for divination. Thereafter it fell into disrepute until it re-emerged in the eighth century as the most prominent type of language used in Arabic administration.¹¹⁴ It was also adopted as a conventional style used by orators during the Friday prayer (*khuṭba*). Ibn Nubāta al-Khaṭīb, the tenth-century 'preacher of preachers' (*'khaṭīb al-khuṭabā'*) from Aleppo, for instance, composed a collection of sermons in *saj'* prose which became models of style for preachers.¹¹⁵ During these prayers the reigning caliph's name was mentioned – one of the essential markers of caliphal authority.¹¹⁶ By the twelfth century *saj'* had also advanced to being a popular literary form, exemplified *par excellence* by al-Ḥarīrī's eloquent *Maqāmāt* (a compendium of tales).¹¹⁷ This type of inscription is highly unusual, if not unique, on a textile and hints at a specific awareness at Roger II's court of the status of *saj'* in the Arabic context. The prestige and popularity of the literary form chosen for Roger II's Kufic inscription is undeniable.¹¹⁸

Acknowledging an awareness at the Norman court of the status of the literary form chosen for the inscription of the mantle adds a further aesthetic dimension to the interpretation of the ornamentation, one mediated through sound rather than sight.¹¹⁹

¹¹² AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 34; JOHNS (2004), p. 48.

¹¹³ 'Since pre-Islamic times, the word *sadj'* in the sense of "to recite or to speak with assonances, using cadenced and elaborate language", has denoted a type of more or less rhythmical prose of which the principal characteristic is the use of rhythmic units which are generally quite short (from 4 to 10 syllables, on average), terminated by a clausula.' A. BEN ABDESSELEM, *Sadj'* (in Arabic literature of the Islamic Period), in: *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (second edition), vol. 10 (2000), p. 734.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 735.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Nubāta, *Diwān khuṭab Ibn Nubāta* (including the sermons of his son Abū Ṭāhir), with commentary by al-Shaykh ṬĀHIR AL JAZĀ'IRĪ, Beirut 1894. Julie Scott MEISAMI, *Oratory and sermons*, in: *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 2 (1998), p. 594; Clifford E. BOSWORTH, *Khuṭba*, in: *ibid.*, p. 449; Alfred F. L. BEESTON, *Al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥarīrī and the maqāmāt genre*, in: Julia ASHTIANY et al. (eds), *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (*The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*), Cambridge 1990, p. 126.

¹¹⁶ Arent J. WENSINCK, *Khuṭba*, in: *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (second edition), vol. 5 (1986), p. 74. Caliphal authority was also publicly expressed through minting coins and inscribing *ṭirāz* in the caliph's name. SANDERS (1994), p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Rina DRORY, *Maqāma*, in: *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 2 (1998), p. 508.

¹¹⁸ Rhymed prose enjoyed similar popularity in the contemporary Latin context and may have been in fashion also at the Norman court. See BAUTIER (1990), p. 9; Karl POLHEIM, *Die lateinische Reimprosa*, Berlin 1925.

¹¹⁹ Johns also suggests that the mantle's inscription would have been 'suitable for recitation aloud.' JOHNS (2015), p. 134.



Fig. 76: Central part of the inscription on Roger II's mantle.

The inscription as a whole is relatively plain in style. One particular ornamentising element in the mantle's inscription, however, is the refined play with the interlocking letters *lam* and *alif*, which occurs eleven times. Al-Samman counts five different varieties of the interwoven *lamalif* on the mantle and notes that the repartition of these ornamental insertions in the plain ductus of the inscription gives the writing a livelier rhythm.¹²⁰ In fact, the *lamalif* shapes not only provide a visual rhythm, but also underline the great importance attributed to the sound of the inscription, which derives from the needs of the literary form to be recited aloud.

Although the iconography and decorative scheme of the mantle follows a central symmetry, arranged around the axis of the tree, the distribution of the *lamalif* shapes on the mantle is unbalanced. They occur seven times on the right half of the mantle and only four times on the left. Of course, this can be attributed to the intrinsic needs of the language. Nevertheless, it is striking to note that while visual symmetry could have been established at one particular point of the inscription, this was deliberately not done (Fig. 76). Supposedly, when the mantle was worn, only the central part of the inscription would have been visible. This central part reads: '*wa-bulūgh al-amānī wa-l-āmāl / wa-ṭīb al-ayyām wa-l-layāl*' ('and realisation of desires and hopes, and delights of days and nights'), corresponding to the Arabic:

و بلوغ الاماني و الامال / و طيب الايام و الليال

Arabic letters can be extended and shortened to almost any degree to fill a space. It would therefore have been easy, at this central point, to match the iconography's symmetrical layout in the inscription by using the three ornamental interwoven *lamalifs* (underlined in the Arabic) surrounding the mantle's vertical axis. The axis of sym-

¹²⁰ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 32.

metry, marked by the tree on the mantle (and by the vertical stroke in the quotation above), is flanked by two almost equidistant *lamalif* shapes to its right and left. In my view, the central *lamalif* was deliberately not aligned with the tree, but placed slightly to the right of the vertical axis in order to leave the centre to the ‘symmetry’ of the rhymes. This absence of visual symmetry in the central part of the inscription strongly suggests that the *lamalif* was treated as an integral part of the writing, rather than being attributed much ornamental importance. The same can be said for the text itself, which does not emulate the symmetrical visual structure of the rest of the mantle. It is clear and legible and rather than following a purely visual layout, it was arranged so that the literary structure of the verses could be detected by a learned reader. This demonstrates, once again, that the idea of a purely formal appreciation of Arabic inscriptions on the Norman garments ought to be discarded. In the case of the mantle, it is the symmetry of sounds, rather than that of the form of the letters, which is used to match the symmetrical arrangement of the mantle’s iconography.

6 Political Scheme or Practical Reasons? Arabic Language in Norman Public Inscriptions

The circumstantial evidence gathered from the written sources and the close analysis of the garments themselves suggest that the audience of the inscriptions on the Norman ceremonial garments can have consisted only of very few select individuals, the king and courtiers, high ranking members of the clergy and noblemen from all over the kingdom, as well as perhaps some foreign visitors to the treasury, such as the Muslim traveller Ibn Jubayr. Returning to the question of the role of Arabic in Norman public display raised at the beginning of this chapter, we thus need to ask again why so many of the inscriptions were in the Arabic language.

Were the languages of public inscriptions in Norman Sicily chosen to suit any particular political scheme? Whose voice do they represent? Was the choice of the Arabic language for public inscriptions conditioned by the practical circumstances of their production, or might it be related to the intended viewers? Was it the aim of the inscriptions to express the status of the Norman kings in a language and form intelligible to the Arab neighbours, or to the remaining Arab population of Sicily? The great majority of the people of Palermo spoke Arabic, which had been the main language of Sicily before the island’s conquest by the Normans, during the two hundred years of Islamic rule over the island.¹²¹ The Latin clergy, on the other hand, as well as the magnates, dukes, princes and counts, who would have been present both at court and during Norman royal ceremonies, would probably not have known Arabic. Were Arabic inscriptions devised for Muslim viewers?

¹²¹ JOHNS (2002), p. 5.



Fig. 77: Christ Pantocrator with bilingual codex, mosaic, apse of the cathedral of Cefalù.

Many of the Norman mosaics, including the important narrative cycles of the Cappella Palatina and Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, contain captions in Greek. Arabic does not appear in this artistic medium, and instances of the use of Latin titles, as in Monreale Cathedral, or Latin and Greek together – as in the depiction of the codex held up by Christ pantocrator in the cathedral of Cefalù (Fig. 77) – are rarely found. Given the great tradition of the mosaic medium in Byzantine art, the choice of this language was likely to have been conditioned by the training and cultural background of the craftsmen, rather than related to a political choice by the patron. The same practical issue of whether the choice of one language over another derived from the artistic tradition of the craftsmen may also be raised with regards to other media, including textile inscriptions. As seen in the first part of this study, the textile workshops of Norman Sicily employed Arabs and Greeks. If we think of the textile inscriptions as having been conceived and produced by Arabs, the inscriptions may naturally have been perceived as representative of the voice of the Norman king's Arab subjects. This would correspond to Grabar's suggestion that the mantle's inscription may speak in

the voice of Arab embroideresses of Roger II's court.¹²² However, as we have seen on the alb and sword belt, Latin inscriptions are also found, both woven and embroidered. Moreover, Arabic inscriptions in the *opus sectile* technique,¹²³ which were made under Roger II for the palaces of Palermo and Messina, provide an example of the use of inscriptions across artistic traditions, since they clearly unite an Arabic ornament with a technique that was used in the Latin sphere. It seems, therefore, that there was more flexibility to the choice of languages for the public inscriptions of the Norman court than one might expect when taking the assumption of a dependence on an artistic medium as a starting point.

The language in which Norman public writing was devised did not necessarily have any bearing on their intended recipients either, as is particularly evident from the series of privileges renewed by the Norman chancery between 1144 and 1145 using the Arabic language.¹²⁴ They were issued in Messina and Palermo, often to recipients residing in the Greek parts of the kingdom, who were both laypersons and representatives of the clergy.¹²⁵ Many of them would not have known Arabic and would probably have understood no more from the bilingual documents than the symbolic value of their letters as representations of royal power.¹²⁶

In contrast, the different languages of the tomb slab, commemorating Anna, mother of Roger II's priest Grisandus, could be thought to address viewers from the four main religious traditions of Sicily: Judaism, Islam, and Greek and Latin Christianity.¹²⁷ The epitaph (40 × 32 cm) shows a central roundel with a cross inlaid into the marble slab in *opus sectile* and surrounded by the letters *IC-XC NI-KA*, which stand for the Greek phrase 'Jesus Christ conquers' (Fig. 78). The visual layout of the slab is strictly symmetrical, so that the central cross is surrounded to the left and right by two almost square fields containing incised Latin (left) and Greek (right) inscriptions. A Judaeo-Arabic inscription is located at the top of the slab, incised into a rectangular field, while an Arabic one fills a field which spans the entire width of the

¹²² GRABAR (2005), p. 41.

¹²³ JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.1; NEF, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.2.

¹²⁴ Thirty-three documents have been identified as pertaining to this campaign. Two thirds (twenty-two) of these documents were issued in Greek, five were in Latin and the remaining six were bilingual Greek and Arabic. JOHNS (2002), p. 117.

¹²⁵ On the campaign of privilege renewal, see *ibid.*, pp. 115–18.

¹²⁶ 'The *jarā'id* renewed in 1145 were of little or no practical use to their recipients, but they were potent memorials of royal authority. [...] As [the recipients] returned to their estates and churches, they carried with them a vivid, but disturbing and perplexing, impression of the new regime, and a tangible statement of the authority of the royal *diwān*, its central role in the administration of the kingdom and in the execution of royal policy, written in letters which they could understand only as symbols of royal power.' *Ibid.*, p. 300.

¹²⁷ Johns suggests that Roger II may have attempted to establish a trilingual church to accommodate also the converts to Christianity from Judaism and Islam. See JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIIIb, p. 778.



Fig. 78: Quadrilingual epitaph from San Michele Indulciis, 1149, Museo della Zisa, Palermo.

slab underneath the central medallion. The remaining spaces are filled with coloured *tesserae* in *opus sectile*. All four inscriptions are accompanied by crosses on the first line, which clearly mark the Christian content of these inscriptions. In the case of this epitaph, as Johns has suggested,¹²⁸ there seems to be a message of unification through the Christian faith, despite the different languages. In addition, though, much of the content of this and the other multilingual funerary inscription for Grisandus' father Drogo (Fig. 64) relates to Grisandus himself, as the founder of the chapel and patron of his parents' tombs. The multilingual funerary inscriptions are reminiscent of the equally multilingual genre of royal foundation inscriptions. It is conceivable, therefore, that these epitaphs also indicate an intentional display of the patron's close connections to the royal court.¹²⁹ The linguistic choice at the level of the production of

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ WOLF (2009), p. 51.

these inscriptions, and the image of royalty that multilingualism as such would have conveyed, may thus well have prevailed over considerations of who would have read the inscriptions.

Finally, turning to the few contemporary written sources describing the art works of Norman Sicily, it clearly appears that there was no perception of a division between different styles in terms of a religiously defined association with Islamic and Christian cultures which would correspond with modern day art historical classifications. Significantly, Falcandus, for example, does not mention the 'Islamic character' of the Cappella Palatina ceiling. The ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, a structure built in the Arabic *muqarnaş* technique, which is inscribed with Arabic letters and has been stylistically related to Fatimid painting, may thus not have been perceived as drawing upon 'Islamic' culture.¹³⁰ Falcandus' description, instead, focuses on the 'elegance of the structure', the variety of the painting and the splendour and sheen of the gold.¹³¹ The slightly earlier description of the Cappella Palatina by Philagathos, cited earlier, mentions textiles that the 'Phoenicians' made, but also fails to mention any reference to an Islamic style. While it is, of course, a possibility, as Lev Kapitakin has suggested, that Arab Christians from Egypt may have been employed in this case,¹³² it is also possible that divisions between Islamic and Christian cultures and provenances of craftsmen were accorded far less importance in Mediterranean artistic practice than the division between the disciplines of Islamic and European art history would suggest. In my view, and this will be pursued in more depth in the two final chapters, the Norman Arabic public inscriptions, and those on the royal garments in particular, were not intended to be received by Muslim viewers, nor indeed necessarily perceived as representing a foreign or unusual language within the Norman court.

130 Literature on the painted *muqarnaş* ceiling of the chapel is numerous. See, for example, Lev KAPITAİKIN, *The Twelfth-Century Paintings of the Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, Palermo, Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University 2011; GRUBE/JOHNS (2005); Ugo MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Rome 1950.

131 '*Supremi vero fastigii tabulatum insignis elegantia celature et miranda picture varietas passimque radiantis auri splendor exornant.*' SIRAGUSA (1897), p. 180.

132 KAPITAİKIN (2011).

Chapter IV

The Kufic Inscription on Roger II's Mantle: Continuity as a Political Choice

The case study of Roger II's mantle picks up on the question raised in the previous chapter of 'practical' versus 'political' motives behind the use of its antiquated Kufic inscription, and ultimately argues that there was a combination of both. Some of the mantle's components appear firmly anchored in a local Sicilian tradition and so can be considered indicative of a local continuity in artistic idioms. However, the representation of a Sicilian continuity across political change is also to be considered a political choice, one which can be best understood when the mantle is analysed against the political tensions of its time. It is my contention, in fact, that the Arabic textile inscriptions on the Norman royal garments cannot be dissociated from the varying political contexts of their production. The focus of this chapter lies specifically on the early period of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, while the last chapter focuses on William II's reign.

A focus on continuity between pre-Norman and Norman Sicily, as well as on the period preceding 1130 and Roger II's subsequent rule as king, is a departure from most art historical studies of medieval Sicily, which tend to consider the period of the Norman kingdom in isolation. The most recent research, which is largely based on studies emphasising the Normans' interest in artistic imports, takes as its starting point a 'premise of cultural discontinuity, rather than a presumed continuity with local traditions.'¹ Johns, for example, rejected any idea of continuity by pointing to the importation of Fatimid elements to the Norman chancery in the 1130s.² He argued that the active introduction of an 'Arabic facet' to Roger II's idiom of royal representation also extended to the fields of art and architecture, including notably epigraphy, which should not be considered as a remnant of a local tradition.³

Jill Caskey's recent article on Norman stuccoes from the late eleventh century offers an alternative perspective. It is based on the study of architectural ornament from three early Norman churches: Santi Pietro e Paolo at Italà (in the province of Messina), San Giuliano at Caltagirone (in central Sicily) and Santa Maria dei Terreti (near Reggio Calabria on the Italian mainland) (Fig. 79). Stucco as a medium has often been relegated to the margins of art historical enquiry, yet Caskey's examples are particularly relevant here since they shed light on the evolution from Arabic to Latin

¹ Jill CASKEY, *Stuccoes from the Early Norman Period in Sicily: Figuration, Fabrication and Integration*, in: *Medieval Encounters* 17 (2011), p. 82.

² JOHNS (2002).

³ Johns refers to Arabic monumental epigraphy and palace architecture in particular. See JOHNS (1993); JOHNS (2006).



Fig. 79: Stucco fragment from Santa Maria de Terreti with Arabic inscription, late 11th c., Museo Nazionale, Reggio Calabria.

visual vocabularies during the early Norman period, a time of political transition. She provides arguments supporting the idea that there were interactions between artisans trained in different traditions and makes a strong case for continuity in the production of stucco ornament.⁴ Although some of her theses remain conjectural, Caskey's idea that there was continuity specific to particular artistic mediums can be extended to include the later Norman period as well. Stucco *transennae* with Arabic-inscribed frames similar to those of San Giuliano are known, for example, from Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and San Giovanni degli Eremiti in Palermo.⁵

Caskey's research on medium-specific continuity in the artistic production of medieval Sicily has inspired the attempt here to contextualise Roger II's mantle within

⁴ CASKEY (2011), p. 86.

⁵ DELL'ACQUA (2003/4), figs. 8, 9, 10.

the Arabic epigraphic tradition of Sicily, an attempt intended to complement Johns' thesis of the introduction of an 'Arabic facet' to Roger II's court after his coronation in 1130. While I fully agree with Johns' emphasis on the active appropriation of Arabic elements in the visual idiom of Roger II's court, what I propose to investigate here is the extent to which this appropriation might also have involved the Arabic past of Sicily, and ultimately whether Roger II's mantle may be situated within a local artistic tradition and yet still transmit a political message.

1 The Origins of the 'Arabic Facet' of Roger II's Court: 'Re-Arabisation'?

The question of a possible continuity of artistic practice between pre-Norman and Norman Sicily and between Roger II's rule before and after the establishment of the Norman kingdom in 1130 cannot be addressed without a more precise presentation and discussion of Johns' important thesis of the 're-Arabisation' of Roger II's court.⁶ This thesis is based on the observation that the production of Arabic documents in the Norman chancery seems to have come to a halt in the early twelfth century. Following their gradual conquest of Sicily in the mid-eleventh century, the Norman rulers had been able to take over the administrative system of their Kalbid predecessors, allowing them to promulgate and enforce their newly gained authority. The same takeover can be observed with regards to the Arabic currency of the island, since we know that Robert Guiscard's mints initially kept producing the highly valued golden Sicilian *tarís* (Fig. 80).⁷ The chancery was then gradually staffed with Greek Christians, until Arabic was almost totally superseded by Greek as the main administrative language between 1110 and 1115 and the pre-conquest administrative system was replaced.⁸

No Arabic documents survive from the period between 1112 and Roger II's coronation in 1130.⁹ Yet in the 1130s and 1140s Roger II's chancery suddenly began issuing Arabic and bilingual documents in an unprecedented campaign of privilege renewal by the Norman ruler.¹⁰ Of course, the corpus of Norman Arabic documents represents just a fraction of the output of the trilingual Norman chancery. Nevertheless, the surviving material evidence has led Johns to conclude that there was a decisive shift in the Norman administration after Roger II's coronation in 1130. Johns defines this as a 'renaissance' of Arabic administration, which, as he proposes, was occasioned by the

⁶ JOHNS (2002).

⁷ TRAVAINI (1996), p. 182. Robert Guiscard's first golden *tarí* was most probably struck in the mint, which would also have been used by the Arab rulers; it bore his name and title in Arabic. See Thomas DITTELBACH, *The Image of the Private and the Public King in Norman Sicily*, in: KNIPP (2003/4), p. 153.

⁸ JOHNS (2002), p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.



Fig. 80: Golden *tari* of Robert Guiscard with an Arabic legend, 464 AH/1072 AD, Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.

introduction to Norman Sicily of a system closely modelled on that of contemporary Fatimid Egypt.¹¹ Johns identified Roger II's minister George of Antioch as the 'chief architect of this new Norman *dīwān*.'¹²

As far as it can be reconstructed from the remaining sources, the Arabic epigraphic programme of Roger II's court also appears to have been initiated principally in the 1130s, alongside other major artistic commissions. Roger II's mantle and the painted and inscribed ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, for example, elements of which can be related to an Arabic visual tradition, were produced precisely at the time of the shift in the Norman administration. Johns has argued, therefore, that Arabic epigraphy at Roger II's court should be considered a part of the same political scheme, which was also the motivation for the establishment of a Norman administrative *dīwān*.¹³ The consequence was the creation of a strong link between Norman Arabic epigraphy and administration, which were both elements used for the public expression of royal authority.

The emphasis on the intentional introduction of Arabic elements to the political language of the Norman kings in the 1130s, which is supported by an analysis of the formal characteristics of surviving administrative documents, is a major argument against the idea of a continuity between pre-Norman and Norman public writing. Moreover, Johns underlines the change during the Norman period from Kufic inscriptions – known also from the pre-Norman period – to cursive script, which is what most of the Norman inscriptions are written in.¹⁴ Yet, as we have seen, this does not apply to the Kufic inscription of the mantle, which will be central to the analysis below.

The shift towards the 're-Arabisation' of the Norman courtly idiom, however, does not correspond to a change of ruler. Although Roger II's kingship and the kingdom

¹¹ Ibid. On Fatimid administration see SANDERS (1994); Ernst POSNER, *Archives in Medieval Islam*, in: *The American Archivist* 35 (1972), p. 299; Samuel M. STERN, *Fatimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fatimid Chancery*, London 1964.

¹² JOHNS (2002), p. 257.

¹³ JOHNS (2006), p. 333.

¹⁴ JOHNS (2006), p. 331.

of Sicily were proclaimed only in 1130, Roger had been ruling Sicily as a count since 1105; he assumed sole authority in 1112.¹⁵ While the shift may correspond, as Johns suggests, to the elevation to George of Antioch to *ammiratus ammiratorum* (emir of emirs) in 1132, it is noteworthy that he too had already been working for the Norman court – in fact ever since he arrived in Sicily in 1108.¹⁶ It is probable, therefore, that the shift towards the renewal of the Arabic component in Roger II's chancery was not occasioned by political circumstances, which remained centred on the same ruling figure and his entourage during the entire first half of the twelfth century. In fact, we may ask whether this shift may be interpreted as a reaction to the new status of Roger II as king and to the ensuing redefinition of his relationship with external powers, including the papacy.¹⁷

The Normans had been accorded the status of papal legates, which made them masters of the Sicilian church, independently of the papacy.¹⁸ They had conquered Sicily as vassals of the Pope and retained the status of rulers over a papal fief until Roger II's kingly rank was recognised by a part of the Church in 1130, when he was crowned by the Antipope Anacletus II.¹⁹ This recognition of royalty (at least by one of the rival popes) reinforced Roger II's claim to his ancestors' authority over the Norman dominion in southern Italy. However, the question of whether the Norman monarchy was hereditary or dependent on the temporary concession of power by the papacy remained an open question and a source of tension until 1156, when the Treaty of

¹⁵ HOUBEN (1997), pp. 32–62.

¹⁶ JOHNS (2002), p. 74: 'Like the other leaders of the comital administration, George of Antioch was a Greek but, unlike them, he was not a son of Magna Grecia. George had received his training, first, in Antioch and elsewhere in the Byzantine East where he had learnt Arabic and the arts of financial administration, and then in Zirid Ifriqiya (1087–1108). When he arrived in Sicily he was initially employed by Christodoulos as district governor of Iato in the hinterland of Palermo, and it can only have been after his entry into the central administration, and especially after his elevation to the rank of prime minister on the fall of Christodoulos, probably in the course of 1126, that his unique experience and training began to have any significant influence.' For a translation of al-Maqrīzī's biography of George of Antioch, see *ibid.*, pp. 80–90.

¹⁷ On changing relations between the Normans and the Popes, see Graham LOUD, *The Papacy and the Rulers of Southern Italy 1058–1198*, in: LOUD/METCALFE (2002), pp. 151–84; Josef DEÉR, *Papsttum und Normannen: Untersuchungen zu ihren lehnsrechtlichen und kirchenpolitischen Beziehungen*, Cologne 1972.

¹⁸ Kantorowicz stresses the importance of the Normans' legatine office, which endowed them with the right to appoint clerics in their domain. The Normans' 'bishop-like' garments and behaviour attracted the attention of contemporary commentators. See KANTOROWICZ (1958), pp. 164–65.

¹⁹ Antonio MARONGIU, *A Model State in the Middle Ages: The Norman and Swabian Kingdom of Sicily*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6 (1964), pp. 308–09. Anacletus II's subsequently contested privilege that authorised the creation of a hereditary Norman kingdom of Sicily is preserved in a 14th c. manuscript (Cod. Vat. Ottobon. Lat. 2940, fols. 18–19). See translation in LOUD (2012), pp. 304–06.

Benevento confirmed the permanence of Norman dynastic rule over southern Italy.²⁰ After this date, the Normans' legitimacy was no longer in doubt,²¹ although this did not exclude further tensions, especially with the Hohenstaufen successors of the Norman kings.²² There was a mutual interdependence, therefore, between the Norman rulers, whose legitimacy depended upon papal confirmation, and the papacy as feudal overlords, who would have received considerable financial tribute from their vassals.²³

Accordingly, in the following sections, I propose to consider Roger II's Arabic-inscribed mantle as a marker of political authority rooted first in the tradition of local craftsmen, and secondly in the local political language of Roger II's Arab predecessors, who were part of an Arabic Mediterranean authority independent of papal recognition that was still in place at the time of the Norman kings.

2 Tracing Continuities in Silk Production and Epigraphy in Pre-Norman and Norman Sicily

To establish whether there were medium-specific continuities across political change, it is necessary first of all to introduce the remaining material and written evidence. Although sources are very scarce, I shall briefly touch upon possible continuities in pre-Norman and Norman textile production. Focusing on epigraphy, however, will prove more fruitful here, because more material traces remain and because it was used extensively on the island before and after its conquest by the Normans, in both private and public contexts.

2.1 Silk Textiles and Funerary Epigraphy in Pre-Norman and Norman Sicily

Many of the professions listed in the extant administrative records of medieval Sicily are related to private sericulture and weaving.²⁴ The name *ḥarīrī*, for example, often associated with Arab silk workers, appears in documents from various locations all over the island which date to between 1095, prior to the establishment of the Norman

²⁰ LOUD (2002), pp. 159–61. A letter by Pope Paschal II dated 1 October 1117 to Roger, the future King Roger II, who was then still a count, shows how actively the hereditary nature of the privileges accorded to his father by Pope Urban II was contested. HOUBEN (1997), pp. 36–37.

²¹ LOUD (2002), p. 178.

²² Folker REICHERT, *Der sizilische Staat Friedrichs II. in Wahrnehmung und Urteil der Zeitgenossen*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 253 (1991), pp. 31–35.

²³ DEÉR (1972), pp. 73–74.

²⁴ Timothy James SMIT, *Commerce and Coexistence: Muslims in the Economy and Society of Norman Sicily*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota 2009, p. 151.

kingdom, and 1183.²⁵ It is very likely that the individuals listed were active in local, provincial workshops, working in the tradition established during the period of Islamic rule over Sicily and continuing it into the Norman period.

The private production of *dibāj* fabrics, for example, can be singled out as one which seems to have continued across the political changes of medieval Sicily. Medieval documents found in the *geniza* (storeroom) of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo show that brocaded fabrics of this type were produced in Islamic Sicily.²⁶ Moreover, a document from 1185 listing the Muslim *villani* of the district of Monreale mentions not only the son of a *ṭirāz* embroiderer, but also thirty-two silk-weavers and one *dibāj*-weaver,²⁷ thus providing further evidence to suggest that *dibāj* production continued under the Normans. One additional piece of evidence for Ifriqiyan–Sicilian *dibāj* production is a tombstone found in Palermo with an epitaph commemorating the death of a *dibāj*-weaver named Ibrāhīm Ibn Khalaf.²⁸

Yet actual textiles cannot be reliably identified. The sparseness of material sources for the early periods stands in stark contrast to the remarkable corpus of preserved textiles associated with twelfth-century Sicily. The curious absence of entries for pre-Norman Sicilian silks from contemporary European church inventories may suggest that Sicilian fabrics were not commonly considered very prestigious.²⁹ There must have been exceptions, however, since Sicilian production of costly silks and gold-woven textiles is attested from the tenth century. A report from 975 states that the textiles discovered on board a captured ship were more beautiful than those from Sicily because they were finer and the gold thread used of better quality.³⁰ It might be possible to relate the gold-woven textiles mentioned here to a Sicilian tradition which appears to have lasted until the end of the Norman period. In fact, as seen in the first chapter, numerous gold-woven fragments all executed in the same technique and with the same type of gold thread (*Häutchengold*) – including the textiles which line the inner hem of Roger II's mantle – have been identified as being of Sicilian manufacture (Fig. 81). Further analyses are needed to determine if some of these textiles

²⁵ Records correspond to the years 1095, 1141, 1145, 1178 and 1183. Ibid., p. 152.

²⁶ JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.5, p. 774. On 11th c. silk-production in Sicily, see also AMARI/NALLINO (1935), pp. 448–49.

²⁷ JACOBY (2006), p. 386. The mention of *ṭirāz* here most probably refers to a private institution, since courtly *ṭirāz* are not documented in medieval Sicily. CUSA (1868–82), pp. 134–79.

²⁸ Johns, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.5.

²⁹ JACOBY (2006), p. 387.

³⁰ JACOBY (2004), p. 62. Quotation from the 'lettre de Ibrahim ben Aabdi (*Codice diplom. Arab. Sicil.*, t. I, p. 510)': 'Sul bastimento predato ... si trovarono molte casse piene di drappi assai piu vaghi di quelli che si lavorano in Sicilia, giacche erano travagliati con maggior esatezza, perche l'oro era piu delicatamente filato, piu lustro e piu colorito di quello che si lavora in Sicilia ... Li uomini che si trovarono su quel bastimento erano tutti mercatanti che passavano da una città all'altra.' This is quoted from a letter written by the 'émir Albumenin' to the 'émir Chbir de Sicile'; see *Glossaire archéologique du moyen âge et de la renaissance*, ed. by Victor GAY, Paris 1887, Liechtenstein 1967, p. 582.



Fig. 81: Fragment of a tapestry-woven silk, Sicily (?), Treasury of Münster Cathedral.

might predate the Norman era. However, continuity in the production of these tapestries in the Norman period can be established thanks to their use as parts of Roger II's funerary garments, as well as on the stockings inscribed in the name of William II.

There is no evidence to say whether this type of gold-woven tapestries was produced privately or in the Sicilian court, but it is likely – given the costliness of these textiles – that the court would have been involved. As shown in Chapter 2, there was no Sicilian *ṭirāz* institution comparable to that of the Fatimid court. However, there is ample evidence both for the activity of Arab craftsmen in the Norman court workshop, even after the abduction of Jewish weavers from Byzantium in 1147,³¹ and for continuous private silk production in pre-Norman and Norman Sicily. It is very likely, moreover, that continuous private production in pre-Norman and Norman Sicily influenced court production, not least for the practical reason that it would have made skilled craftsmen available. I would argue that the same can be said about Arabic epigraphy in pre-Norman and Norman Sicily.³²

Arabic funerary inscriptions are one element of private Arabic epigraphy illustrating this practical continuity. There have been a large number of Arabic funerary inscriptions found in Sicily. Amari lists fifty-two (including the multilingual ones discussed earlier) dating from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. Many are now kept in the Galleria Regionale di Sicilia in Palazzo Abatellis (Fig. 82). However, some of them, especially the more recent examples, were clearly not made in Sicily but were imported. Interestingly, inscribed funerary steles – especially from the Islamic Maghreb and Ifriqiya – also seem to have been brought to Sicily during the pre-Nor-

³¹ Conf. Chapter 1, 1.3.

³² The possibility of a continuity between the textile workshops of Arabic and Norman Sicily until the introduction of Byzantine weavers to Sicily in 1147 has been suggested by JACOBY (2006), p. 385; see also Raymond Cox, *Les soieries italiennes du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance*, in: *La revue de l'art ancien et moderne* 30 (1911), p. 410.



Fig. 82: Funerary stelae in Palazzo Abatellis, Galleria Regionale di Sicilia, Palermo.

man and Norman periods as merchandise to be completed *in situ* with the names of the deceased.³³

The epitaph of Ibrahīm Ibn Khalaf al-Dībājī, for example, dated 1072,³⁴ when Norman rule was being firmly established on the island, cannot clearly be ascribed either a Sicilian or an Ifriqiyān provenance. The content of its inscription does not reveal its place of manufacture, nor does the style of the inscription, which is written in a Kufic script used in both regions (Fig. 83).³⁵ Economic and political relations between Sicily and Ifriqiyā between the ninth and the twelfth centuries were very close.³⁶ Islamic Sicily was placed under Ifriqiyān overlordship until the mid-eleventh century, when the Norman conquest of the island began. A few decades later, from the

³³ Vincenza GRASSI, *Le stele funerarie islamiche di Sicilia: Provenienze e problemi aperti*, Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: Moyen-Age 116 (2004), p. 357.

³⁴ It was kept in a Jesuit college in Palermo until the eighteenth century. It is now in the Museo Lapidario Maffei in Verona (inv. 5060). JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.5.

³⁵ On these stylistic affinities, see SOURDEL-THOMINE (1962), p. 312.

³⁶ On political and economic relations between Norman Sicily and Ifriqiyā, see BRESCH (1998); Michael BRETT, *Muslim Justice under Infidel Rule: The Normans in Ifriqiyā 517–555 AH/1123–1160 AD*, in: *Cahiers de Tunisie* 43 (1991), pp. 325–68; Jeremy JOHNS, *Malik Ifriqiyā: The Norman Kingdom of Africa and the Fāṭimids*, in: *Libyan Studies* 18 (1987), pp. 89–101; David ABULAFIA, *The Norman Kingdom of*



Fig. 83: Tombstone of Ibrāhīm Ibn Khalaf al-Dībājī, 464 AH/1072 AD, Sicily/Ifriqiya.

1140s to 1160, the political history of Sicily and Ifriqiya became entangled again when King Roger II of Sicily extended his rule to Africa. The tombstone is one object which illustrates the impact of the political ties between Sicily and Ifriqiya on the visual appearance of Norman epigraphy. Given the shared political history during both the Arabic and Norman period of Sicily, artistic connections across the Mediterranean certainly deserve more attention than they have been given so far.³⁷

Returning to Amari's list, also mentioned are examples of funerary steles from the 1160s, well into the period of Norman rule, and much earlier ones which were made prior to and during the conquest.³⁸ There is some evidence, therefore, for the ongoing use and production of private funerary epigraphy, which would suggest that there was a medium-specific continuity throughout the period of transition between Arab and Norman rule.

Africa and the Norman Expeditions to Majorca and the Muslim Mediterranean, in: Reginald A. BROWN (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 7* (1984), pp. 27–49.

³⁷ This research need provided the impetus for a summer school in Tunisia, organised as part of the project 'Art, Space and Mobility' by the KHI Florence and the Getty Foundation (directed by Hannah Baader, Avinoam Shalem and Gerhard Wolf) in 2011, which I was allowed to join.

³⁸ The first part of Amari's catalogue lists early examples of funerary epigraphy (cat. I–XVIII). However, not all of the funerary inscriptions can be related with certainty to Sicily. AMARI/GABRIELI (1971).



Fig. 84: Kufic inscription on the exterior of the Great Mosque of Sfax.

2.2 Public Epigraphy from Pre-Norman Sicily

The list of surviving examples of public epigraphy associated with the Arab rulers of Sicily is short. However, given the close ties between Ifriqiya and Sicily, and given that such inscriptions were extremely prominent in the architecture of Aghlabid and Fatimid Ifriqiya,³⁹ it is very likely that they would have been used with some prominence in Ifriqiya's Sicilian province too. There would probably have been many more. One possible reason for the scarceness of remaining public inscriptions is intentional destruction. It is no rarity in the history of Arabic epigraphy to find the names and titles of previous rulers being erased after the advent of a new dynasty. This can be seen particularly well from the example of a tenth-century Kufic inscription from the great mosque of Sfax in medieval Ifriqiya, on which all passages explicitly referring to the Fatimid rulers were very carefully erased (Fig. 84).⁴⁰

³⁹ Public epigraphy from Aghlabid Ifriqiya is prominently displayed, for example, in the monumental friezes on the facade of the 'Mosque of the Three Doors' in Kairouan, in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Sousse, or crowning the walls of the Bou Fatata mosque in Sousse.

⁴⁰ Jonathan BLOOM, *Erasure and Memory: Aghlabid and Fatimid Inscriptions in North Africa*, in: EASTMOND (2015), p. 62. It is possible that the openly Shiite content of Fatimid inscriptions would have been deemed offensive by the later Sunni rulers.

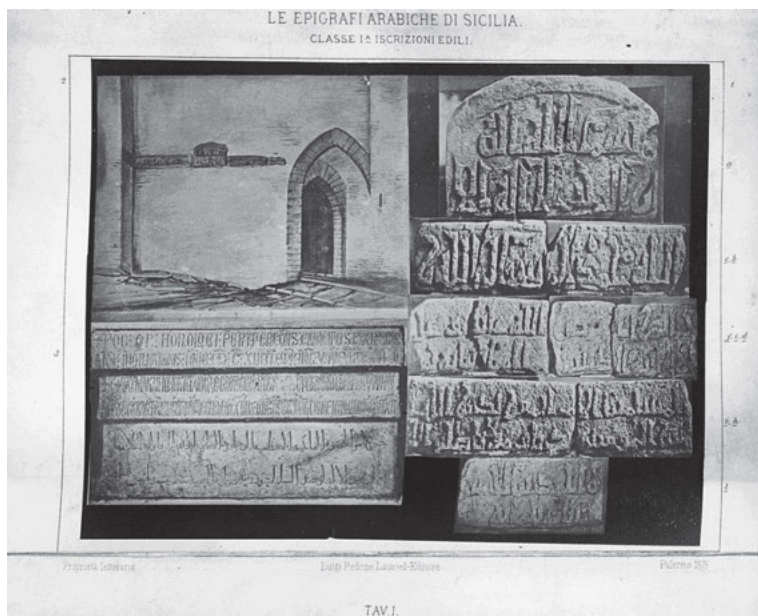


Fig. 85: Arabic foundation inscription, Museo Comunale, Termini Imerese, inv. n. 158 (right and top left).

The earliest example of public epigraphy related to the Islamic rulers of Sicily is dated to 974 and commemorates Ḥasan Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Yuḥannis al-Ṣiqillī’s landing on the island of Linosa.⁴¹ It is executed in graffito scratched into baked brick and therefore differs greatly from the monumental inscriptions carved in stone that were found in Sicily. The second oldest inscription is a sculpted monumental inscription in Kufic letters on sandstone. This commemorates the building of a castle at Termini Imerese and may well have been commissioned by the region’s Arab rulers (Fig. 85).⁴² The plain Kufic letters are arranged in two superimposed lines on each of the rectangular stone fragments, one of which is slightly rounded at the top – making it resemble a small tympanon – and may have originally been placed above an opening in the wall of the building. The inscription refers to the Kalbid governor of Sicily and the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz, allowing for a dating of this inscription to the tenth century.⁴³ Another monumental public Arabic inscription from this period is reported to have been placed prominently on a tower flanking one of the city gates of Palermo,

⁴¹ Vincenza GRASSI, Ṣiqilliya, in: *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (second edition), vol. 9 (1997), p. 590.

⁴² The eleven remaining fragments are preserved in the Museo Civico of Termini Imerese.

⁴³ AMARI (1875), cat. I, pp. 11–17.



Fig. 86: Arabic bath with Kufic inscription, Cefalà Diana.

the so-called *Bāb al-baḥr* (Gate of the Sea). This gate was erected in 942 and would have been in use in the Norman period and later, until it was destroyed in 1564.⁴⁴

The sculpted frieze inscribed with Kufic letters on an Arabic bath at Cefalà Diana in the Palermitan hinterland, on the other hand, probably ought to be dated to the eleventh century (Fig. 86).⁴⁵ The inscription is badly weathered and can no longer be deciphered, but it is possible to make out some stylistic elements suggesting that the Kufic letters were embellished with floriation. The idea of placing such an inscribed frieze with a public inscription in Arabic at the top of a building was continued in Norman architecture, for instance on the churches of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and San Cataldo, as already seen, but also in the later Norman pleasure palaces Cuba and Zisa, which will be introduced in the following chapter.

In addition to these examples, there are public Arabic inscriptions on columns, which appear to date mostly from the eleventh century and would probably have served as decorative architectural elements in Sicilian mosques and palaces.⁴⁶ As required by the narrow format of the column shafts, these inscriptions, mostly consisting of Qur'ānic verses, are relatively small and inscribed into rectangular frames. Many of these columns were reused in Norman buildings, including Santa Maria

⁴⁴ JOHNS (2006), p. 324.

⁴⁵ Alessandra BAGNERA, Anneliese NEF, *Les bains de Cefalà* (prov. de Palerme): Contexte historique et fonctions, in: Marie GUÉRIN-BEAUVOIS and Jean-Marie MARTIN (eds), *Bains hygiéniques et bains thérapeutiques de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge*, Rome 2007, pp. 263–308.

⁴⁶ Amari lists a total of twelve inscribed columns from pre-Norman Sicily AMARI (1875), cat. XII–XXIII.



Fig. 87: Inscribed column from Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.

dell'Ammiraglio, the church of Roger II's minister George of Antioch, so they ought to be counted as constituent parts of the urban landscape of Norman Palermo.⁴⁷

One of the couple of inscribed columns flanking the nave of George of Antioch's church carries an explicitly religious Islamic inscription, drawing on verse 16:128 of the Qur'ān, which is followed by another line quoting the *ḥasbala* (Fig. 87).⁴⁸ According to Johns, George of Antioch's introduction of the *ḥasbala* into the documents of the Norman chancery may have determined the inclusion of this particular pre-Norman Islamic spoliium into the architectural complex of the church.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the second column is inscribed with royal attributes, which are also among

⁴⁷ For bibliographical references on the uses of spolia in medieval Europe, see Dale KINNEY, *The Concept of Spolia*, in: Conrad RUDOLPH (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, Oxford 2010, pp. 233–52.

⁴⁸ The formula translates as 'God is sufficient for us! How excellent a representative is He!' See JOHNS (2002), pp. 279–80. The column is discussed in *ibid.*, p. 51; AMARI (1875), cat. XVIII, p. 79, pl. IX.9.

⁴⁹ It was used as an equivalent to the Latin *apprecatio* in Norman administrative documents. JOHNS (2002), pp. 279–80.

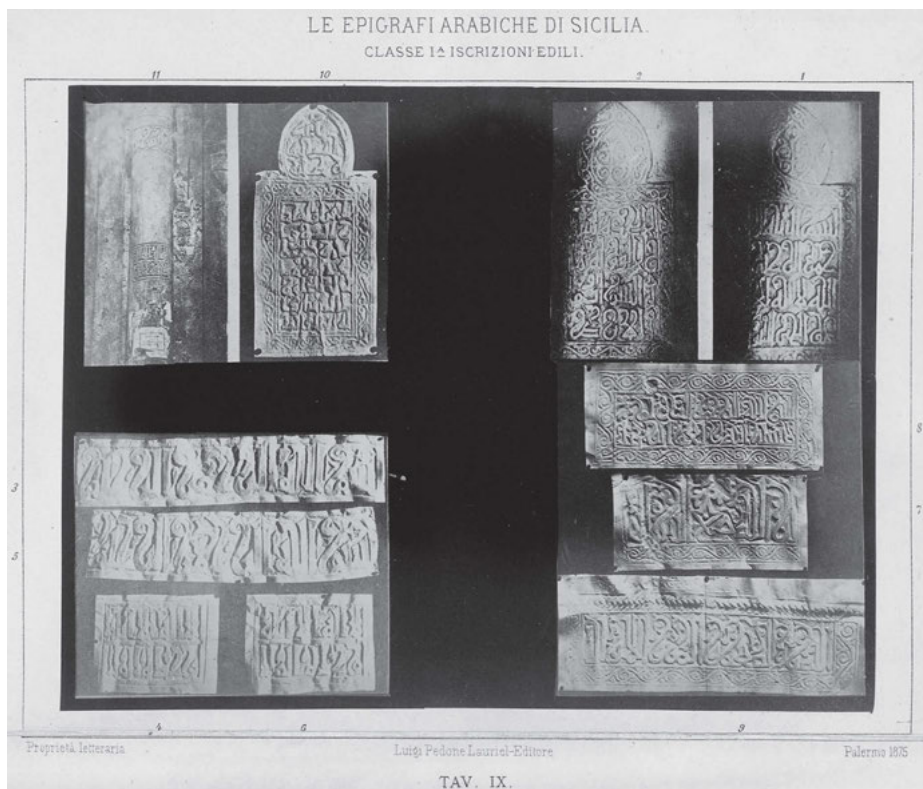


Fig. 88: Inscribed columns from pre-Norman Sicily. Numbers 7, 8, 9 (lower right) refer to the columns from Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.

the components of the inscriptions of Roger II's mantle and the Cappella Palatina: *'al-naṣr wa-l-ẓafar wa-l-ʿizz wa-l-iqbāl'* (victory, triumph, power, and good fortune).⁵⁰ It is Johns' hypothesis that these columns may have been chosen as references to King Roger II and his minister, who were also represented in the mosaics of the church.⁵¹ While this is possible, it is difficult – for stylistic reasons – to agree with his suggestion that the second column would have been produced under Roger II to create a pendant for the earlier one.

The inscriptions gathered on Amari's plate IX (Fig. 88) include those on both the columns mentioned above. Numbers 7 and 8 correspond to the inscriptions at the top and centre of the first column, while number 9 corresponds to the column with a central inscription resembling inscriptions from the period of Roger II. These are juxta-

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

⁵¹ JOHNS (2006), p. 329.

posed on the plate with other examples of inscriptions on pre-Norman spolia, including two shield-shaped inscriptions from columns used in the church of the no longer extant Monastero delle Vergini (nos. 1 and 2), a similar inscription from a column now placed in the portico of Palermo Cathedral (no. 10), another one which was found in the church of San Francesco (no. 11), and four inscriptions from San Giacomo la Mazara (nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6).⁵² Except for these last inscriptions, all of them are remarkably similar in style and execution.⁵³ As with all other examples, the inscription from our column (no. 9) is written in simple Kufic script with indented terminals and very discrete signs of floriation. It is surrounded by a frame of undulating vegetal motifs which are also found on almost all of the other examples, and in particular on the other column of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (no. 8). So there is nothing in the style or content of this inscribed column to suggest that the non-religious Arabic inscription was carved in the Norman period, rather than also having been taken as a spolium from a previous building. Acknowledging a pre-Norman origin for this inscription, which closely resembles Norman ones, implies that the possibility of continuity between pre-Norman and Norman epigraphy must be reconsidered.

The remaining material sources of Arabic epigraphy from pre-Norman Sicily show that Arabic epigraphy was used extensively for both private and public needs. Evidence of public inscriptions, such as the inscribed frieze from Termini Imerese, or the inscription on Palermo's ancient city gate, moreover, suggests that monumental public inscriptions commemorating the foundations and palaces of the Arab rulers would have played an important role in Islamic Sicily. It is highly probable that these inscriptions would have retained an important visual presence in the Norman period and may have provided an impetus for the Norman appropriation of this public language of authority.

2.3 Arabic Epigraphy from the Period of Roger II's Rule

Eleven of the sixteen Norman Arabic inscriptions listed by Johns are dateable to between the 1130s and 1154, thus corresponding to Roger II's rule as king.⁵⁴ These include four multilingual inscriptions: the trilingual inscriptions commemorating the foundation of a water clock in Palermo and of a public monument in Termini Imerese, as well as the two multilingual funerary inscriptions commissioned by Roger II's priest Grisandus. In addition to these we may count the window frames in stucco with Kufic inscriptions, which can be associated with the churches of Santa Maria

⁵² AMARI (1875), cat. XIV and XV, pp. 77–78.

⁵³ The relevance of this stylistic difference cannot be assessed without additional evidence on the architectural history of this now destroyed church.

⁵⁴ JOHNS (2006), p. 335.

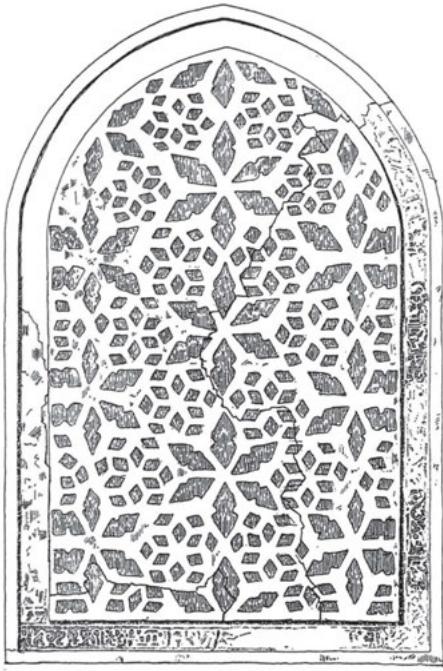


Fig. 89: Window-frame with Arabic inscription, stucco.

dell’Ammiraglio and San Giovanni degli Eremiti (Fig. 89).⁵⁵ These inscriptions, which provide important clues towards the possible links between the artistic production of eleventh- and twelfth-century Sicily, have been rather overlooked in studies of Norman Arabic epigraphy and still remain to be transcribed. Including these means that the total of surviving Arabic inscriptions produced under Roger II’s rule amounts to a little more than a dozen. These inscriptions are extremely varied in content, style and technique, suggesting that Arabic public inscriptions were not confined to one specific artistic medium and would probably have been common in the visual idiom promoted under Roger II’s rule.

Apart from the incised multilingual inscriptions, which have relatively simple cursive scripts, there are, for example, two different types of inscriptions on the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina: the Kufic inscriptions surrounding the star shapes surmounting the central nave (Fig. 90), and the bands of cursive inscriptions in the aisle on the southern side.⁵⁶ A perhaps lesser-known example is the Kufic inscription mentioned above painted along the base of the dome of George of Antioch’s church, Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio (Fig. 61).⁵⁷ It was probably made shortly

⁵⁵ DELL’ACQUA (2003/4), pp. 61–62.

⁵⁶ JOHNS (2010); GRUBE/JOHNS (2005); JOHNS (2006), p. 328; SOURDEL-THOMINE (1962), pp. 308–09.

⁵⁷ AMARI (1875), cat. XXIV, pp. 83–90.

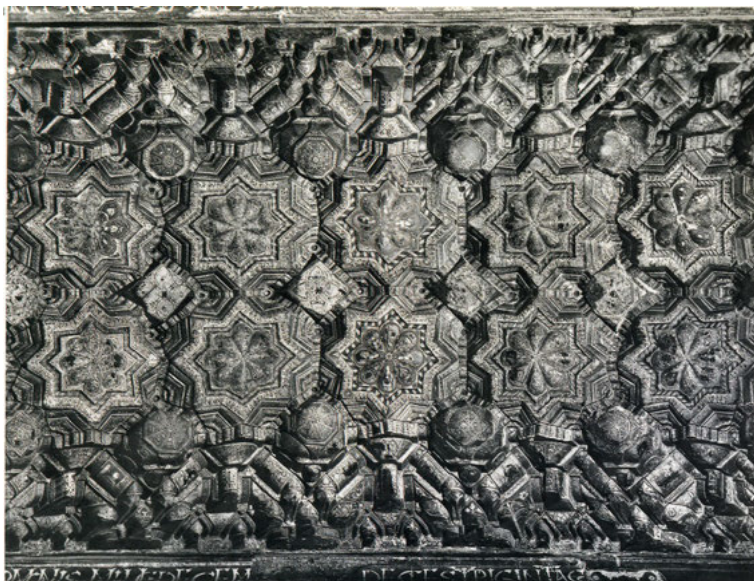


Fig. 90: Arabic inscriptions on the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, nave.

after 1143, which corresponds to the foundation date of the church.⁵⁸ The plain and rather large angular Kufic letters, some of which are embellished with vegetal scrollwork, were painted in white on a dark ground. The inscription is introduced with a large cross inscribed with the Greek formula '*Iesus Christus Nika*' (Jesus Christ will conquer). What follows is an Arabic translation of a Greek prayer. The obviously Christian context in which all of these inscriptions were displayed and – in the case of the last inscription – the Christian content very clearly show, once again, that Arabic inscriptions were not exclusively used in the secular sphere and did not always imply a reference to Islam.⁵⁹

The last two groups of inscriptions to be looked at here are the fragments of monumental inscribed friezes in *opus sectile* which glorify Roger II's palaces of Messina and Palermo.⁶⁰ Johns has observed that the terminology used in the verses of the Palermi-

⁵⁸ JOHNS (2006), p. 335. For a history of the church, see Ernst KITZINGER, *La chiesa di S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio a Palermo*, in: *Beni Culturali e Ambientali Sicilia: Accademia di Scienze Lettere e Arti di Palermo* 6/7 (1985), pp. 11–31.

⁵⁹ This contradicts to some extent Tronzo's suggestion that Arabic styles were used in the secular spaces and Byzantine styles in the liturgical spaces of Norman Sicily. TRONZO (1997), p. 114.

⁶⁰ AMARI (1875), cat. III, IV, V, pp. 25–32. See also ENZENSBERGER (2002); JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.1, pp. 499–501; NEF, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.2, pp. 502–09,

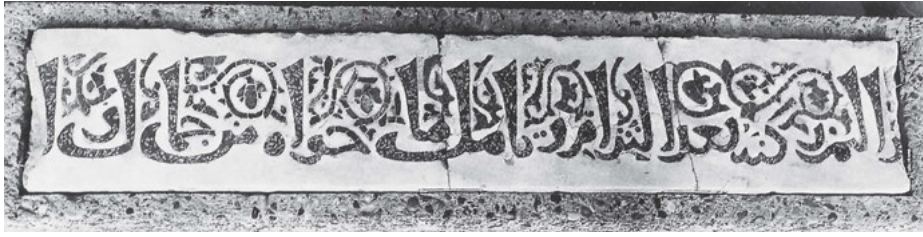


Fig. 91: Arabic inscription in *opus sectile* from the Norman Palace of Palermo, fragment, 1130–54, Palazzo Abatellis, Galleria Regionale di Sicilia.

tan fragments is based on vocabulary relating to the Islamic *hajj* ritual (Fig. 91).⁶¹ This is particularly striking because an analogy between the *Ka'ba*, as a place of religious worship, and the palace of the ruler is also made in the Fatimid context.⁶² However, while the content of Roger II's inscription is reminiscent of Fatimid verse and may thus be taken to support Johns' thesis of a close connection between the introduction of an Arabic facet to Roger II's courtly idiom and Fatimid Egypt, the idiosyncratic technical execution of these inscriptions reveals a major process of transformation and adaptation. *Opus sectile* is a technique unknown in Arabic epigraphy except for these examples from the Norman court of Sicily. Although, as Johns has demonstrated very convincingly, numerous parallels can be traced between Fatimid Egypt and Roger II's idiom of royal display, Fatimid forms and contents were not simply copied or taken over in Norman public writing, but carefully adapted to suit the Norman context.

The role of the importation of foreign Arabic elements in the formation of a Norman courtly idiom after the establishment of the Norman kingdom must certainly not be underestimated. However, given that certain continuities can be traced in both the textile medium and epigraphy, I propose to complement Johns' thesis by focusing in more detail on the inscription of the mantle, the inscribed frieze of the bell tower of the church of San Giacomo la Mazara, and the painted inscriptions of the central part of the Cappella Palatina ceiling. These inscriptions not only resemble each other in content, but also share a certain formal similarity – they are among the rare examples of inscriptions from Roger II's reign in Kufic letters, whereas the others are written in cursive script.⁶³ As can be seen from the inscribed columns in George of

⁶¹ JOHNS, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2006), cat. VIII.1, p. 766.

⁶² See also OESTERLE (2009), pp. 259–62.

⁶³ Kufic is also used on the window-frames in stucco, in accordance with the medium-specific tradition described in CASKEY (2011). The painted inscription from the dome of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio is also executed in Kufic style, thus matching the window-frames and the inscribed columns, which were taken as spolia.

Antioch's church, very similar inscriptions were also used in pre-Norman Sicily. Did the symbolic use of these columns inside the church and the obvious similarity in the wording of these pre-Norman inscriptions with Norman inscriptions and chancery documents from Roger II's rule point to a deliberate proclamation of local political continuity by the Norman court?

3 Roger II's Mantle as Part of a Local Artistic Tradition

Roger II's mantle is unique. Nevertheless, all its components fit within larger Mediterranean artistic traditions. This includes its iconography and Arabic inscription, its colour, the techniques and materials from which it was made, and its shape. It is slightly more difficult, given the scarceness of evidence, to locate the mantle within a local Sicilian tradition. Tronzo has convincingly argued that it was rooted in Norman royal iconography.⁶⁴ Moreover, as we have seen above, there is a possible continuity in medieval Sicily in the production of gold-woven tapestries which might also be relevant to the mantle's lining. The epigraphic evidence is particularly helpful, however, in situating the mantle in a local artistic idiom.

Johns has shown the parallels in style and content between the mantle's Kufic inscription and Norman inscriptions, such as those on the central part of the painted ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, focusing especially on the wording of the invocations used in both cases.⁶⁵ The long Kufic inscription from the bell tower of the former church of San Giacomo la Mazara in Palermo also contains royal invocations based on the same terminology as those of the mantle and the painted ceiling.⁶⁶ This inscription in sturdy Kufic letters is now lost:⁶⁷ all that remains is Amari's reproduction of a twelve-metre-long rubbing on twenty-four different sheets of paper, made by the architect Saverio Cavallari in 1837 (Fig. 92).⁶⁸ The length of the rubbing indicates that the original inscription would probably have surrounded the four sides of the bell tower as a frieze.⁶⁹ There have been differing opinions on the correct order of the inscriptions' wording, as well as on its dating. Amari suggested that it may have been created in 1100.⁷⁰ Such an early dating can also be found in Franz Kugler's descrip-

⁶⁴ TRONZO (2001).

⁶⁵ JOHNS (2006), p. 329.

⁶⁶ AMARI (1875), cat. VII, pp. 42–47, pl. V.1.

⁶⁷ The church itself was destroyed in the 17th c.; the bell-tower with the Arabic inscription appears to have been preserved until the mid-18th c. JOHNS (2006), p. 324.

⁶⁸ AMARI (1875–79), cat. VII, pp. 42–47.

⁶⁹ Apart from a few minor fragments, only the first metres of the inscription appear to be missing in the rubbing. JOHNS (2006), p. 324.

⁷⁰ This was based on his reading of some fragmentary parts of the inscription as a date. AMARI (1875), p. 46.



Fig. 92: Arabic inscription from the former bell tower of San Giacomo la Mazara, Palermo, reproduction of a rubbing.

tion of the church,⁷¹ whereas Johns has proposed an alternative dating to the reign of Roger II as king, based on the observation of the stylistic and textual similarity of this inscription with the Kufic ones commissioned by Roger II's court.⁷² The connection to Roger II can be very plausibly made; it is unclear, however, whether the church was built (and the inscription sculpted) during Roger's reign as king, or, as Amari has suggested, before 1130. The building of churches dedicated to the Latin rite can, in fact, be retraced to the very beginning of Norman rule over Sicily in the later eleventh century,⁷³ so that a dating to Roger's early rule as count is a distinct possibility.

The date of the mantle's inscription, 1133/4, corresponds to the period which Johns identified as being one of re-Arabisation at the Norman court. Although the content of the mantle's inscription is unparalleled in the textile medium, its form and its use on a royal garment are strongly reminiscent of the Arabic *ḫirāz* tradition, which, as I have argued, suggests that there was an awareness of the political connotations of

⁷¹ Franz Kugler's description of the ruins reads: 'S. Giacomo la Mazara zu Palermo, (im Hofraume der Caserne beim Palazzo Reale), ein seltsam schwerer byzantinisierender Säulenbau mit gedrückten Spitzbögen, am Kranzgesims des vorn an der Ecke stehenden Glockenthurmes mit arabischer Inschrift.' He dates the church to the late 11th–early 12th c. Franz KUGLER, *Geschichte der Baukunst*, Stuttgart 1859, p. 110.

⁷² JOHNS (2006), p. 324.

⁷³ CASKEY (2011). For a list and illustrations of Sicilian religious architecture between 1061 and 1130, see Guido DI STEFANO, *Monumenti della Sicilia normanna*, Palermo 1955, pp. 3–26, pl. 1–46.



Fig. 93: Funerary stelae, Palazzo Abatellis, Museo Regionale della Sicilia, Palermo.

such inscribed textiles in Arab contexts. Of course, the inspiration for the use of such an inscription on the mantle may have derived from a transfer of knowledge from the contemporary Arab sphere and its subsequent adaptation in the Sicilian court. Yet there is one element of the mantle's inscription which suggests that it may not have been imported from abroad but rooted in a local Arabic tradition.

As the stylistic analysis in Chapter 2 has demonstrated, the very plain Kufic script on the mantle is rather old-fashioned when compared to contemporary examples of inscribed textiles from Fatimid Egypt, for example. Scholars such as Al-Samman and Janine Sourdel-Thomine have noted, moreover, that the style resembles Ifriqiyan and pre-Norman Sicilian epigraphy.⁷⁴ To mention just one example, the funerary inscription on a stele which is now kept in Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo (Fig. 93)⁷⁵ displays very similar characteristics to the Kufic inscription of the mantle. It is dated 470 AH (1077/8 AD). The inscription is sculpted in a plain Kufic script, and embellished – like that on the mantle – with indented terminals, intertwined *lamalifs* and trefoil-shaped *ʿayns* (Fig. 6). This resemblance strongly suggests that there may have been a certain formal continuity between pre-Norman examples of Sicilian epigraphy and the inscription of the mantle.

In the absence of further evidence, we can only speculate about the possible role of the inscription of San Giacomo la Mazara in establishing an epigraphic connection between the different periods of Roger II's rule and between pre-Norman and Norman epigraphy. The inscribed column from the church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (Fig. 87), however, does establish such a connection across the political changes of medieval Sicily: the similarities between the style and wording of this pre-Norman inscription and the one on Roger II's mantle underline the mantle's embeddedness in a Sicilian tradition which goes beyond the chronological confines of the Norman period.

There may well be practical reasons behind the continuity traced in the public use of Arabic inscriptions and the employment of similar royal invocations in pre-

⁷⁴ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 32; SOURDEL-THOMINE (1962), pp. 311–12.

⁷⁵ AMARI (1879), cat. VIII, pp. 35–37, pl. IV, figs. 2a and b.

Norman and Norman Arabic inscriptions, including the one on the mantle. These may be related to the availability of craftsmen and a local tradition of Arabic epigraphy within which the mantle was produced. As we have seen, an ongoing tradition can be traced with some certainty in private epigraphic production, and it is, of course, possible that skilled local craftsmen were also employed by the court. In addition to these practical considerations, however, we can ask whether the prominent display of Arabic epigraphy in the context of the early Norman kingdom could not also point to a deliberate display of political continuity. In fact, such a display might not only be the result of practical considerations, but also stem from a decision to use an already established language of authority in order to express political stability.

4 Situating the Production of Roger II's Mantle in its Political Context

The mantle should therefore be seen as an expression of both political continuity and of change. The slightly antiquated Arabic inscription on the mantle, which is part of the Sicilian tradition, points to the appropriation of the authority of the previous rulers,⁷⁶ while at the same time proclaiming a change of allegiance through its association with the Latin form of the garment.

But why might it have been beneficial for Roger II to use a language of public representation which explicitly drew upon an older tradition? The political context – particularly the relationship between the Norman kings and the papacy – helps to clarify this. Of course, Norman Sicily did not relate exclusively to the papacy; the newly established dynasty had to find its place among the political forces of the medieval Mediterranean, which certainly included Byzantium and the caliphates.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the focus on the Normans and the papacy seems particularly important here since there was a strong relationship of interdependence between these two political powers. As mentioned previously, the Norman rulers depended upon papal legitima-

⁷⁶ In the Fatimid context, for example, taking possession of the garments of an enemy, or a predecessor, appears to have been perceived as greatly enhancing the power and status of their new owner. Jenny Oesterle mentions the accession to power of al-Ḥākim's son, who was vested with the turban of his great grandfather al-Mu'izz. OESTERLE (2009), p. 152. Historical sources report, moreover, that some old Abbasid garments were kept in the Fatimid treasury to disgrace the Abbasid rivals of the Fatimid caliphate. SANDERS (2003), p. 229. Another example of a deliberate appropriation of ancient Kufic script at a much later period (14th c.) can be found in the Sultan Hasan Complex in Cairo. See EASTMOND (2015), p. 3, note 4.

⁷⁷ The necessity for Sicily to position itself within a larger, imperial context is clearly already perceived by Norman contemporaries, such as Romuald of Salerno, who speaks of Roger II's ambitions and treaties with 'Africa', 'cum rege Babyloniae' (whom Johns identifies as the Fatimid caliph) and Byzantium. JOHNS (1987), p. 90.



Fig. 94: Document with rota of Roger II, 1133.

tion; the papacy would have greatly benefited from the extensive yearly tributes paid by the Normans.⁷⁸

The interdependence and rivalry between the Normans and the papacy is reflected also in the material sources. Various scholars have drawn attention to the resemblance of the Norman diplomas to papal privileges.⁷⁹ To sign his documents, for example, Roger II used a purple *rota*, a circular symbol which closely resembled the papal ones (Fig. 94).⁸⁰ Moreover, the shape and colours of the Norman garments closely mirrored the contemporary medieval papal vestments;⁸¹ the use of purple and porphyry ought to be singled out as a marker of power used by the papacy and the

⁷⁸ LOUD (2002); DEÉR (1972), p. 74. Innocent II's privilege to Roger II which authorised the creation of the Norman kingdom (long after his rival Anacletus II had granted that privilege in 1130) stipulates that a 'census of 600 *scifati* shall be paid every year'; trans. in Loud (2012), p. 312.

⁷⁹ KÖLZER (1990), pp. 112–13. Robert-Henri Bautier pointed out that the papal chancery and the chancery of William II's chancery employed people educated in the same school. BAUTIER (1990), p. 12.

⁸⁰ DITTELBACH (2003/4), pp. 151–56.

⁸¹ Clothing was important in establishing a recognisable link between the pope and papal legates, such as the Norman rulers of Sicily. The legate who visited Emperor Otto III in 1001, for example, donned the same clothing and regalia as the pope. Jan KEUPP, *Die Wahl des Gewandes. Mode, Macht und Möglichkeitssinn in Gesellschaft und Politik des Mittelalters*, Ostfildern 2010, pp. 164–65.

Normans alike.⁸² It is, of course, very probable that both Normans and papacy here drew upon the imperial tradition of Byzantium, which they may have sought to rival.⁸³ Apart from the attempt to match papal representation, however, there appears to have been a clear drive towards emancipation from papal authority at Roger II's court – the mantle is but one example of this. It was produced at Roger's court in 1133/4 in the shape and colour of an imperial coronation garment, although he did not receive the papal privilege to actually use such a garment in ceremonies until 1149.⁸⁴ Moreover, both the mosaic of Roger II being crowned by Christ in the Martorana (Fig. 39) and the titles that he employed in the Latin chancery documents – king of Sicily '*dei gratia*' and '*divina favente clementia*' – downplay the fact that his authority descended from the Pope. It is little surprise that the papal documents addressed to the Norman ruler use a rather different title, one which highlights the Normans' dependence on papal power: '*Dei gratia et sancti Petri dux etc.*'⁸⁵ Given the political context outlined here, the choice of symbolically emphasising political continuity through the use of an old-fashioned style of epigraphy rooted in the Sicilian tradition, as well as the novel combination of Arabic and Latin traditions on the mantle, would make perfect sense as a means for the Normans to assert themselves towards the papacy.⁸⁶

82 Josef Deér has argued that although the use of porphyry was rooted in Byzantine imperial tradition, its use in Norman Sicily bore no direct relation to Byzantium, but rather ought to be seen as part of the Normans' rivalry with the papacy in Rome. See Josef DEÉR, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, Cambridge MA 1959. See also DITTELBACH (2003/4), p. 161. On the indebtedness of the papacy to Byzantine imperial forms and ceremonies, on the other hand, see KANTOROWICZ (1958), p. 138.

83 Eve Borsook analyses the royal mosaic cycles of Norman Sicily as markers of 'imperial aspirations', with a side-glance at the papacy. BORSOOK (1990).

84 FILLITZ (1955), p. 124.

85 DEÉR (1972), pp. 117 and 126.

86 The necessity of affirming a Norman legitimacy and identity independent of papal recognition has also been pointed at with regards to the Byzantine elements in the Norman royal image: '[*Nell*'] *imitatio Byzantii si registra un chiaro intento da parte degli Altavilla di mostrarsi come i possessori di un'autorità assoluta che non deriva da niente e nessuno. Nelle proprie intenzioni, la loro corona, continuamente sottoposta agli attacchi del papato, degli imperatori bizantini e germanici e die signori feudali, detiene una specifica ragion d'essere ed una propria legittimità.*' Mirko VAGNONI, *Problemi di legittimazione regia: 'Imitatio Byzantii'*, in: Edoardo D'ANGELO and Claudio LEONARDI (eds), *Il papato e i Normanni: Temporale e spirituale in età normanna*, Florence 2011, p. 190.

Chapter V

A Textile Archive: The Norman Alb as a Document of Political Authority

The analysis of the Norman alb here builds upon the interpretation of the mantle's inscription as an ornament representative of the Norman dynasty's attempt to root its power in the local Sicilian tradition. As with Roger II's mantle, the alb and stocking can also be read as parts of a symbolic visual expression of the permanence of the Norman kingdom of Sicily. However, rather than turning to the practical aspects of the production of these textiles, as I have already done, my aim here is to return to the context of public writing under the Norman kings and give the argument a slightly more 'legal' emphasis. I shall argue that the bilingual inscription of the alb carries a specifically legal function. The inscribed hem of the alb and the garment itself thus ought to be read as documenting William II's royal authority, and may have been produced in view of impending negotiations with the papacy.

To provide a local Sicilian background to the reading of William II's alb and stockings, this chapter begins with an overview of public writing at William II's court. Johns' interpretation of the relationship between Norman epigraphy and administrative documents as tools for the transmission of political messages is particularly relevant for my legal analysis of the alb here. Ultimately, the Sicilian alb provides an expression of political language – and more specifically of legal language – in textile terms.

1 Arabic Public Writing Under William II

During the period of William II's rule (1166–1189), Latin administration had taken a pre-eminent role in Norman administration, so that the majority of documents known were issued in Latin.¹ In fact, Johns' catalogue of the documents related to the Norman *dīwān* contains only nine Arabic documents, three of which are *deperdita* or transcripts known only from later references to the originals.² The first document of the group dates from 1166 and was issued before William's majority in his own name and his mother Margaret's. The last of the group was issued in 1183. Interestingly, all

¹ KÖLZER (1990), p. 103. The 156 Latin documents of William II's chancery are being edited by Horst Enzensberger, who has kindly made available a preliminary edition online: <http://www.hist-hh.uni-bamberg.de/WilhelmII/> (last accessed 08/2016).

² The disparity in numbers alone is a striking warning against any over-interpretation of the Arabic facet of William II's administration. JOHNS (2002), cat. 37–45, pp. 311–14.



Fig. 95: Document from the period of William II, 1182, Perg. n. 31, Tabulario di S. Maria Nuova di Monreale, Biblioteca centrale della regione siciliana.

six surviving original documents from William II's time are multilingual, though to varying degrees and in different languages (Fig. 95). One of them is written in Arabic and only the list of names at the end of the document was transliterated. Four documents are bilingual in Arabic and Greek, and one – issued in 1182 – is bilingual in



Fig. 96: Palace of the Cuba with inscribed frieze, late 12th c., Palermo.

Latin and Arabic, like the inscription of the alb.³ The surviving evidence of public inscriptions in Arabic from the period of William II is similarly scarce. Yet the inscriptions' prominent position on courtly architecture and on the garments suggests that the status of Arabic in royal representation had by no means diminished since the time of Roger II.⁴

The monumental inscription, which surrounds the top of the Cuba, one of William II's pleasure palaces, is composed in a verse form called *ṭawīl* (Fig. 96).⁵ Like the other two inscriptions on the Norman kings' pleasure palaces, the frieze on the Cuba also

³ Another Latin and Arabic bilingual document from Norman Sicily was issued in Frederick II's chancery in 1242. Ibid., cat. 46, p. 314.

⁴ For a listing of these inscriptions, see JOHNS (2006), p. 335.

⁵ AMARI (1875), cat. XI, pp. 62–76. The letters of the frieze are c. 40 cm high and are written in a cursive script lacking all diacritical marks. The beginning of the inscription is located on the north-eastern side of the palace. While the writing is very 'elegant' there, Amari remarks that it turns increasingly stumpy towards the end of the inscription on the Western side of the palace. This may suggest that the layout was not very carefully planned and that the letters had to be thickened towards the end in order to fill the space.



Fig. 97: Palace of the Zisa, Arabic stucco inscription framing the entrance to the *lwān*, mid-12th c., Palermo.

directly addresses a viewer;⁶ it is full of praise for the palace itself and the king, who is mentioned in the Arabic version of his name (*Ghuliyālm al-thānī*) and given his Arabic title. In its location along the top of the building, this inscribed frieze resembles those of the Latin and Greek friezes on the Norman churches of San Cataldo and Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio mentioned above, as well as the Arabic frieze of the palace of the Zisa, which was probably executed under King William I.⁷ As we have seen from the example of the bath at Cefalà Diana, this monumental use of epigraphic friezes can be traced to pre-Norman precedents of public epigraphy. Inside the Zisa, on the other hand, framing the entrance to the famous *lwān* with the fountain, an inscribed frieze in stucco explicitly refers to William II, using his habitual Arabic title *al-Musta'izz* (the powerful through God).⁸ The letters are executed in cursive script and laid out on a ground of vegetal scrollwork in relatively low relief (Fig. 97). The stucco frieze is composed in the *wāfir* verse form, and addresses the viewer in the second person, as

⁶ Ibid., p. 73. Amari's translation: '*bada (qui), fermati e mira.*' On 'speaking' architecture in the Byzantine context, see JAMES (2007).

⁷ AMARI (1875), cat. IX, pp. 49–58. The inscription is composed in verse and lends a voice to the palace itself, which is addressing its viewers in the first person. Amari proposed the following translation of the fragments: '*o tu che[?]', 'chi ti saluta', 'il mio aspetto[?]', 'ti avvicini[?] alle stanze di [...].*'

⁸ AMARI (1875), cat. X, pp. 58–62. On the Arabic titles of the Norman kings, see JOHNS (2002), pp. 268–74.

does the inscription on the facade.⁹ The end of the inscription praises the palace and William II.¹⁰

There are thus four Arabic public inscriptions securely dateable to the time of William II: the alb and stockings, and the monumental inscriptions on the facade of the Cuba and inside the pleasure palace of the Ziza. Unlike some of the earlier inscriptions, however, no Arabic inscriptions from an overtly religious Christian context are known to have been produced in this period. In fact, all of these inscriptions are clearly associated with the court. It also seems that Arabic inscriptions played no significant role in the ornamentation of William II's major commission, the cathedral at Monreale.¹¹ However, inscriptions created earlier – including those in churches and chapels – were, of course, still visible at the time, and others may have since been lost.

Another observation deriving from the overview of the material evidence is that all of William II's Arabic inscriptions were executed in different techniques, a fact already remarked upon with regards to Roger II's inscriptions. William II's textile inscriptions on the alb and stockings are, respectively, embroidered and tapestry-woven; the inscribed monumental frieze running along the top of the Cuba's facade is sculpted in stone, while the inscription inside the Ziza is carved in stucco. Although fewer examples of Arabic inscriptions have survived from William II's rule, this diversity of artistic media shows that, even then, Arabic inscriptions seem to have been a constituent part of the vocabulary of royal representation, rather than being used only by one particular group of craftsmen. This point is particularly relevant for the analysis of the alb and stockings as public inscriptions, since it may provide evidence of the circumstances of the production of such inscriptions under William II and, in particular, of a certain centralisation with regards to the textual and visual conception of these inscriptions.

2 Parallels in William II's Legal and Artistic Self-Representation

The thought of a centralised organ responsible for devising public inscriptions in Arabic takes us back to Johns' thesis of the inter-relationship of administration and epigraphy in the expression of an Arabicising political language of the Norman court. At this point, therefore, the question of the extent to which the production of adminis-

⁹ AMARI (1875), cat. X, p. 61. Amari's translation: '*quantunque volte vorrai, tu vedrai, 'vedrai il (gran) re del secolo.*'

¹⁰ Ibid. Amari's translation: '*Questo è il paradiso terrestre che si apre agli sguardi, questi è il Mosta'izz e questo (palagio) l'Aziz.*'

¹¹ Thomas DITTELBACH, *Der Dom in Monreale als Krönungskirche: Kunst und Zeremoniell des 12. Jahrhunderts in Sizilien*, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 62 (1999), pp. 464–93.

trative documents can be considered as related to the developments in the epigraphic production in William II's period should be addressed.

2.1 Royal Titles in Chancery Documents and Epigraphy – Textual Parallels

Parallels between the output of William II's chancery and the court's epigraphic programme can be found for all four inscriptions mentioned above. One particular parallel pointed out by Johns, for example, is the use of the same royal titles in all public texts, including chancery documents, epigraphy and coins.¹²

Roger II's Arabic title, or *laqab*, was *al-mu'tazz bi-llāh* (the powerful through God). William I, on the other hand, was referred to as *al-hādī bi-amr Allāh* (the guide according to the command of God); William II adopted the title *al-musta'izz bi-llāh* (the desirous of power through God).¹³ The title of Tancred (r. 1189–1194) was *al-manṣūr bi-llāh*. William III (r. 1194), during his short and unsuccessful struggle for power against Henry VI of Hohenstaufen, gave himself the same title as Roger II, *al-mu'tazz bi-llāh*,¹⁴ perhaps in an attempt to demonstrate the rightfulness of his claim to power by showing his relation to the first of the Norman kings. As Johns has suggested, the consistency in the use of the Norman kings' Arabic *alqāb* (names/titles) in different media points to the close relationship between the royal chancery and the courtly epigraphic programme, both aimed at propagating the royal image.¹⁵

To give a concrete idea of this parallel, with reference to the alb and William II's documents, I shall reiterate briefly the content of the alb's inscriptions. The Latin inscription of the alb – '*d(omi)ni w(illelmi) d(e)i gr(atia) regis sicilie ducat(us) apulie et principat(us) cap(ue) filii regis w(illelmi)*' – is highly abbreviated, but corresponds to the standard formula used in the chancery documents of that time, for example in a document confirming the election of an abbot in San Bartolomeo di Carpineto (1181): '*Guilielmus, Dei gratia rex Sicilie, ducatus Apulie et principatus Capue*'.¹⁶ The Arabic,

¹² An evolution in the Arabic appellation of the Norman kings is documented in the mere transliteration into Arabic of the Greek or Latin title (ex.: *al-dūqa*), then in the attempt to find a corresponding Arabic translation (using *sultān* or *mawlā*, for instance). From 1130, Johns identifies a complete transposition of contemporary Fatimid titles, though not of the caliphs but rather of high-ranking court officials. The administrative vocabulary seems to have been carefully adapted to the political needs of the Norman kings, diplomatically positioning the Normans lower in the political hierarchy than the Fatimid caliphs, while clearly proclaiming their special status as Christian kings able to use an Islamic language of power. JOHNS (2002), pp. 273–74. See also JOHNS (2004).

¹³ JOHNS (2002), p. 296.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 42–43.

¹⁶ Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Cod. D 70 inf., f. 70r-v. See ed. ENZENSBERGER: <http://www.hist-hh.uni-bamberg.de/WilhelmII/pdf/D.W.II.112.pdf> (last accessed 08/2016).

on the other hand, is much longer and contains a few additions which are not found in the Latin, such as the explicit mention of William II's function as the protector of Christendom and supporter of the Pope.¹⁷ This particular royal epithet appears to be based on the Latin form '*christianorum adiutor et clipeus*' (helper and shield of the Christians), which was introduced into royal chancery documents under Roger II's rule at the end of 1129. A translation from the Greek, it was used in the early Latin versions of the Norman kings' royal title and remained part of Roger's Greek title right up to his death.¹⁸ Its use in Arabic translation on the alb is particularly noteworthy since it suggests that there may have been a close collaboration – in the form of translations – between the different officials responsible for the three languages of the Norman court.

Both parts of the inscriptions of the alb read like a shortened version of the Latin and Arabic titles used to refer to William II in a bilingual document from 1182. This bilingual *jarīda* lists the boundaries of the estate of Monreale (Fig. 95).¹⁹ The document was written on seven sheets of parchment forming a total length of more than five metres.²⁰ It is introduced by a three-sheet-long Latin translation of the Arabic text, which follows on the remaining four sheets of parchment.²¹ The Latin formulae used to establish the royal authority of the document are '*Willelmus divina favente clementia rex sicilie ducatus apulie et principatus capue*' at the opening,²² and '*regni vero domini nostri willelmi dei gratia magnifici et gloriosissimi regis sicilie ducatus apulie et principatus capue*' following the date at the end of the Latin section and preceding the Arabic text.²³ The Arabic equivalent in translation reads:²⁴

'[...] There went forth the order of the glorified presence, the ruling, the most royal, the Williamian, the magnificent, the powerful through God, the assisted by His omnipotence, the desirous of victory through His strength, the ruler of Italy, Langobardia, Calabria and Sicily, the defender of the pope of Rome, the protector of the Christian community [...].'

¹⁷ Conf. appendix.

¹⁸ ENZENSBERGER (2002), p. 137.

¹⁹ JOHNS (2002), pp. 186–92. For a full transcription of the document, see CUSA (1982), pp. 179–244.

²⁰ JOHNS (2002), p. 186.

²¹ Ibid., p. 186. Johns' table lists the structure of the document: Latin *superscriptio*, Latin *arenga*, Latin translation of the Arabic, Latin conclusion, followed by an Arabic introduction, Arabic *jarīda* listing of six different estate boundaries, Arabic conclusion, and signatures.

²² CUSA (1982), p. 179.

²³ Ibid., p. 202.

²⁴ '*Kharaja amru l-ḥaḍrati al-mu'azzamati l-mālikati l-malakīyati l-ghulyālimīyati l-bahīyati a-musta'izzati bi-llāhi l-mu'taḍidati bi-qudrati-hi l-mustaṣirati bi-qūwati-hi mālikati iṭāliyata wa-nkabardata wa-qalūriyata wa-ṣiqillīyata mu'izzati imāmi rūmīyata l-naṣirati li-l-millati l-naṣraniyati.*' JOHNS (2002), p. 166.

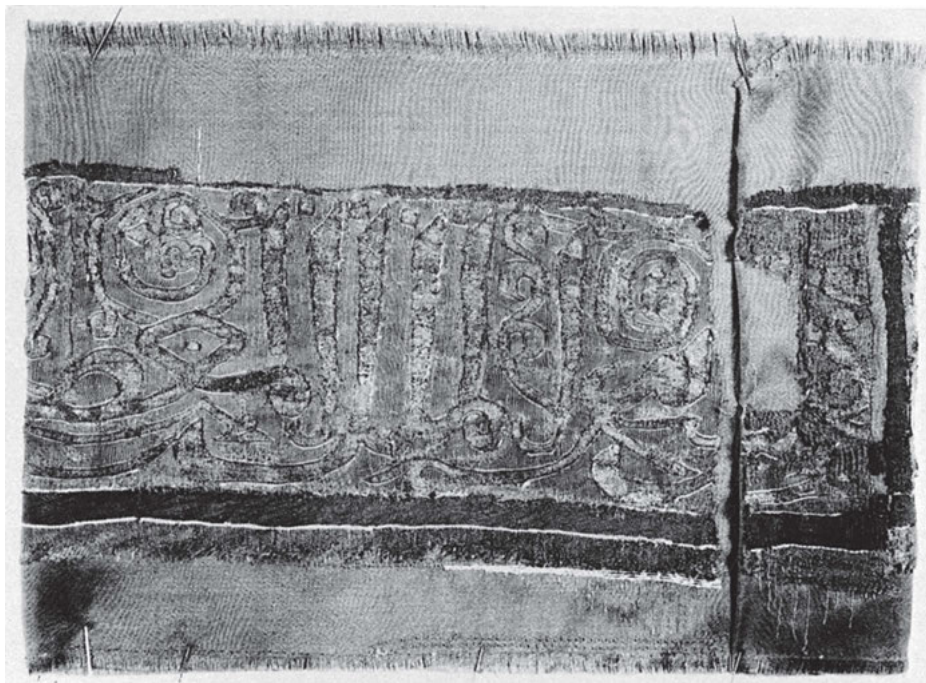


Fig. 98: Detail of the Thuluth inscription on the right stocking.

Although the Latin text is a translation from the Arabic, the language of each of the legal traditions – Arabic and Latin – is maintained, including certain specific features, such as the elative forms of the Arabic titles, which Johns identifies.²⁵ The same can also be said for William's alb, which, as we have already seen, is no mere literal translation.

2.2 Style and Multilingualism – Visual Parallels

Apart from the parallel that can be observed with regards to the textual content of inscriptions and documents, there are also certain visual characteristics shared between the epigraphy and chancery documents of William II. There are similarities, for example, in the use of Arabic cursive script.²⁶

²⁵ JOHNS (2006), p. 336.

²⁶ On the scripts of the royal *dīwān*, see JOHNS (2002), pp. 275–77.

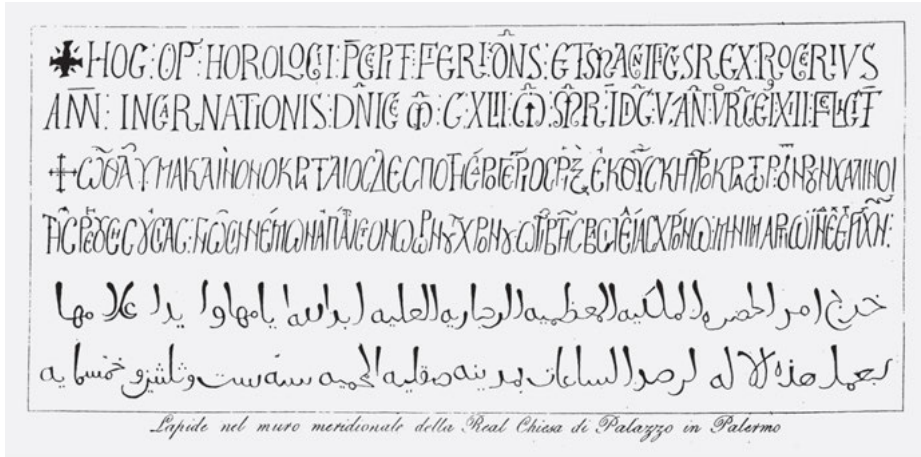


Fig. 99: *Dīwānī* script, chancery style on the water clock inscription.

A stylistic resemblance can be detected particularly in the textile evidence from William II's reign. In fact, the Arabic inscription of the stockings in cursive Thuluth script (Fig. 98) is very similar to that on the alb. The observation of a stylistic similarity across different artistic media (embroidery and weaving) has led Al-Samman to conclude that the same person may have been responsible for devising the two textile inscriptions and for providing a model for the craftsmen to copy.²⁷ If we include also the remaining two cursive Arabic inscriptions from the time of William II, however, the diversity of textual contents challenges this suggestion. Despite the stylistic parallels, it is unlikely that any one particular person in the royal administration was responsible for devising an epigraphic programme in line with the output of the Arabic chancery of William II. A codification of script styles to be employed in royal representation may, nevertheless, have been undertaken by members of the royal administration. Johns has shown that the style of the Norman chancery, which he refers to as *dīwānī* script, appears to have been particularly recognisable. It was clearly different, for example, from the style of writing used on private documents. The same type of script can also be found on Roger II's trilingual foundation inscriptions of the water clock (Fig. 99) and the building at Termini Imerese (Fig. 85).²⁸ It is slightly more difficult, however, to associate the style of William II's chancery documents with the Arabic epigraphy produced under his rule, which – with the possible exception of the textile inscriptions – is extremely varied.

²⁷ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 25.

²⁸ On script forms of Arabic private documents and documents issued prior to introduction of an Arabic administration in the 1130s, see JOHNS (2002), p. 275.

I do not wish to overstate the importance of stylistic similarities between the scripts employed in William II's chancery and those of his epigraphic inscriptions – the final appearance of any epigraphic inscriptions would probably always have depended too on the medium in which it was executed and on artistic fashions. However, the connection between the bilingual inscription of the alb and bilingual documents from William II's chancery is clearly noticeable.²⁹ Taking into account the multiple parallels between the wording, style and bilingual form of the alb's inscription and contemporary documents from William II's chancery, the sections below will pursue the hypothesis that the textile inscription on the alb was used in the same manner as a legal document.

3 The Alb as Document: Visuality and Materiality in the Performance of Legal Acts

A legal document is a written testimony of a legal act, for instance a proclamation, agreement or granting of rights.³⁰ By this definition, legal documents are anchored in the tradition of the laws established and enforced by a specific authority. The ways in which a medieval legal document functioned, however, were not limited to the transmission and understanding of its content in written form. Both its textual content and the document itself as a material object were also part of symbolical performances meant to promulgate and symbolise its legal content, and thus reinforce the authority of their recipients and that of the issuer of the legal documents. The written form and performative elements of the legal act thus need to be understood in relation to each other, not in isolation. What is particularly important, moreover, is the constitutive role of the public in legal acts, who witnessed and validated the legal performance.³¹ It is very probable that the understanding and interpretation of the written words as they were seen in the documents would have been influenced by the recollection of a public act.³²

Aspects of legal performances in medieval Europe, including sound and space, have provided the focus of several recent studies.³³ Hagen Keller, for example, has

²⁹ Links between epigraphy and chancery documents have equally been proposed for Fatimid Egypt, in particular for an inscription on one of Cairo's city gates (Bāb al-Naṣr). See BLOOM (2007), p. 124.

³⁰ Peter GOODRICH, Traditions of Interpretation and the Status of the Legal Text, in: *Legal Studies* 6 (1986), pp. 53–69.

³¹ KELLER (2004).

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 285–86.

³³ Hartmut BEYER, Urkundenübergabe am Altar. Zur liturgischen Dimension des Beurkundungsaktes bei Schenkungen der Ottonen und Salier an Kirchen, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 38 (2004), pp. 323–46; KELLER (2004); Benoît-Michel TOCK, La mise en scène des actes en France au Haut Moyen Age, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 38 (2004), pp. 287–96; Hagen KELLER, Schriftgebrauch und Sym-

shown that legal acts in which the public was actively involved found expression not only in the legal documents, but also through the intermediary of various other media, including insignia, people and their garments, acoustic signals and the places in which the acts were staged.³⁴ Hartmut Beyer draws attention to the liturgical dimension of legal acts in considering the case of royal donations to churches in the Salian and Ottonian periods.³⁵ According to Beyer, it would have been customary to have the legal act of the donation performed in a ceremony, during which the written document would have been laid on the altar of the church to which the donation was given.³⁶ In the case of Norman Sicily, such a legally constitutive act is recorded for Monreale Cathedral, the foundation document for which, issued by William II, was apparently laid on the altar.³⁷ Other types of performance included reading documents aloud, or walking along territorial boundaries confirmed or defined by legal documents. These acts would have turned the written word into a perceptible reality.³⁸

Garments played an important part in liturgical performance, but also of course in the actual legal ceremony of investiture.³⁹ The regalia, which could be worn during the coronation and the re-enactments of investitures during solemn coronations,⁴⁰ would have functioned as a visual and legal reminder of royal rank and authority. The Normans, who were dependent on papal investitures, also seem to have issued garments during the brief period of the extension of the Norman kingdom to North Africa in the 1140s and 1150s. This is reported by Ibn al-Athīr, who writes of the following request made by the ruler of Gabes to Roger II:⁴¹

“I request of you the robes and letter of appointment making me wali of Gabes, and I shall be your deputy there, as are the Banū Matrūh who hold Tripoli from you.” Roger sent him robes and a letter; and he dressed himself in the one, while he read out the other to an assembly of notables.’

bolhandeln in der öffentlichen Kommunikation: Aspekte des gesellschaftlich-kulturellen Wandels vom 5. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 37 (2003), pp. 1–24.

34 KELLER (2004).

35 BEYER (2004).

36 For examples of such donation-ceremonies carried out under Henry II (972–1024), and mostly in his presence, see *ibid.*, pp. 326–27.

37 ENZENSBERGER (1982), p. 31.

38 Property boundaries, for example, could be defined by a group of people walking along the dividing lines between territories. Only when this was done would the boundaries be laid down in written form in a legal document, which would be kept for subsequent reference. KELLER (2004), pp. 283–84. On specific rhetorical means introduced to enhance the literary content of the Norman Latin documents, see also KÖLZER (1990), p. 112.

39 Stewart GORDON (ed.), *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, New York 2001; KEUPP (2010); Jan KEUPP, *Success through Persistence. The Distinctive Role of Royal Dress in the Middle Ages*, in: Rainer C. SCHWINGES and Regula SCHORTA (eds), *Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe*, Basel 2010, pp. 87–96.

40 ERTL (2003); ELZE (1998).

41 ABULAFIA (1984), pp. 33–34.



Fig. 100: Bilingual inscription on the hem of the alb, detail, photograph taken during conservation.

The report stems from a medieval Arabic source and may well reflect a mere literary topos related to the *khil'a* ceremony.⁴² But regardless of whether this passage corresponds to historical reality or not, it shows that the confirmation of authority would have been commonly played as part of a legal performance in which the materiality of the garment and the act of reading out a document in front of witnesses were of the utmost importance.

William II's alb may equally have been produced and perceived as a transmitter of legal contents through its inscription, its anchoring in the Norman legal tradition and its materiality. As we have seen, the bilingual form and formulations as they are found in the inscription of the alb's hem (Fig. 100) may have been borrowed from actual legal documents issued in William II's chancery. The inscribed hem of the alb is stitched together from four separately embroidered pieces of silk, which may well have been made by four different embroiderers. To suit the space of the textiles, William II's royal titles were shortened and the legal text was probably written out on parchment or paper to provide the outlines for the embroiderers' under-drawing.⁴³ This act of replication of the textual content, first through its transformation and adaptation to the textile medium, and then through its reproduction on multiple embroidered copies of the text, might well be added to the chain of elements corroborating the authority of the alb's legal inscription.

Given the preciousness and courtly connotations of the materials used in the manufacture of this royal garment, the material too would certainly have been chosen and perceived to emphasise the durability and validity of the Norman king's royal status. Both the materiality of the garment and the repetition of the inscribed titles of the king on the four separately embroidered pieces of silk may thus have enhanced the authority of the legal formulae on which the alb's inscription was based. We may even ask whether the technicalities of the production of these textiles may not also contribute to the symbolic – and implicit – confirmation of the legal text by the craftsmen. I would argue, therefore, that this material transposition of legal text into the bilingual inscription of the alb and the process of replication involved in the adapta-

⁴² On *khil'a*, see Monika SPRINGBERG-HINSEN, *Die Khil'a, Studien zur Geschichte des geschenkten Gewandes im islamischen Kulturkreis*, Würzburg 2000.

⁴³ Tanja KOHWAGNER-NIKOLAI, *Inschriften auf Textilien oder: Wie läuft der Faden? Versuch einer Annäherung an materialspezifische Eigenheiten*, in: Walter KOCH and Theo KÖLZER (eds), *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde*, Cologne 2009, pp. 225–62.



Fig. 101: Norman Alb.

tion of its legal content to the artistic medium of embroidery considerably heightens the authority of this public inscription.

There are no sources allowing us to determine whether public inscriptions in Norman Sicily, with their poetic, laudatory, commemorative or indeed legal content, may have been read out or ‘performed’ in a similar way to the legal performances mentioned above. However, if we return to the original context of alb, for example, which was made as a ceremonial garment for the Norman kings, the aspect of performance is an important one. If we assume that the alb’s current state reflects essentially its medieval appearance (Fig. 101), we may consider that it was sewn together to be seen from different angles, as suggested by the four inscribed parts of the hem. These angles may have included also the perspective of the wearer of the garment, to whom the inverted inscriptions at the front of the alb would have appeared legible. When the alb was worn during ceremonies, possibly of both legal and liturgical character, during which the Sicilian king would have had to stand or kneel near an altar,⁴⁴

⁴⁴ On the presentation of legal texts at altars, see BEYER (2004).

the hem could be seen as a public confirmation of consent regarding the status of the wearer, and as addressing varied audiences, including the king himself. So, despite their grounding in entirely different sets of traditions, including material, technique, form, style and symbolic meaning, the parallel here between legal documents from the Norman chancery and the royal garment lies in their shared function in the 'performance' of legitimate royalty.

4 The Political Context of the Alb's Embroidered Inscription

On the basis of these parallels between the bilingual inscriptions of the alb and chancery documents, and between the performative qualities attributed to both royal garments and legal documents, the bilingual inscription of the alb may be considered as a textile equivalent to a legal document. However, while legal documents are usually drafted in response to specific circumstances, the date of the inscription on the alb's hem, 1181, does not correspond to any of the key events which the documents, written sources and historians record for William II's rule. His coronation, for instance, took place in 1166, and his marriage to Joan of England in 1177. Moreover, the alb's inscription, like the almost contemporary bilingual register from Monreale in Latin and Arabic, was issued at a time for which only very few documents have survived.⁴⁵ It is thus difficult to relate the date of the inscribed hem to a political event which may have occasioned the production of such a textile.

Looking slightly further ahead, 1181 corresponds to the year of a ten-year peace treaty between Norman Sicily and the Almohads of Spain.⁴⁶ A twelfth-century chronicle from Montecassino relates that this agreement was ratified in Palermo between the king and the '*rege Maxamutorum*', probably a reference to the second Almohad caliph Yūsuf Ibn 'Abd al-Mū'min.⁴⁷ Possibly the textiles of the alb were embroidered to visually enhance the status of King William II or later commemorate the event. But in this case it would be odd that the alb's inscriptions – unlike other commemorative inscriptions, such as that of the water clock in the Norman palace – do not mention this explicitly.

⁴⁵ Only two Latin documents have survived for 1181 and very few are known from the previous years. This scarceness may not be due just to a loss of evidence, yet the particular political or administrative circumstances which may have caused a reduction of chancery activity remain unknown. ENZENSBERGER (1982), p. 57.

⁴⁶ Amari dates this event to 1180. AMARI/NALLINO (1938), vol 3.2, pp. 525–27.

⁴⁷ '*Dominus noster rex fecit treguam apud Panormum com rege Maxamutorum usque ad decem annos, mense Augusti.*' David ABULAFIA, The Reputation of a Norman King in Angevin Naples, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 5/2 (1979), p. 140; KAPITAIKIN (2013), p. 133; Louis DE MAS LATRIE, *Traité de paix et de commerce et documents divers concernant les relations des Chrétiens avec les arabes de l'Afrique septentrionale au Moyen Age*, Paris 1866–72, vol. 1, p. 152.

1181 is also the year of Pope Alexander III's death. What seems most likely to me, therefore, as proposed by Al-Samman, is that the textiles were commissioned in view of an envisaged renewal of the Norman investiture after the Pope's death in August 1181.⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier, the Norman rulers could not claim descent from a long dynastic lineage, but initially ruled over Sicily as conquerors and papal legates. As already seen, they had to seek confirmation of their position and swear fealty to each succeeding Pope. The hem's four inscribed parts, with their emphatic repetition of the Norman king's titles and territorial authority, could have been commissioned in view of impending negotiations with Alexander III's successor.

Although it is plausible that specific garments were commissioned for such occasions, political theory did not always correspond to historical practice. In fact, the renewal of Norman privileges after a papal succession was often delayed. This was particularly true for William II, who did not seem impatient to pronounce his oath of fealty, doing so only in 1188, despite acceding to the throne in 1166.⁴⁹ We do not know whether William II or his successors would ever have worn the alb and stockings before the Pope, whether such an encounter would have been planned when the inscriptions were devised and the garments assembled, or if anyone – let alone the Pope – would have been able to read the inscriptions when the garments were actually worn. Consequently, rather than as an explicit message to the papacy, the alb's bilingual inscription should be read against the constant need to redefine power relationships, and as part of a construction of political authority.

5 The Alb as an Archive of Political Continuity and Legitimacy

To complete the legal reading of the alb, begun here in terms of its bilingual inscription and function in the performance of royalty, I would like to propose that we see the whole garment as an archive of dynastic continuity; in all probability, this display of continuity even went beyond the Norman period, to encompass also the period of Hohenstaufen rule over Sicily.

Scholars have suggested on stylistic grounds that the alb and the stockings were altered under Frederick II. Rotraud Bauer, for example, has argued that the red silk body of the stockings may not have been produced contemporaneously with their inscribed tapestry-woven bands but later, possibly for Frederick II's coronation in 1220.⁵⁰ While this attribution of the textiles to different periods is hard to verify, there is clearer evidence for the alb (Fig. 102). The three handwritten notes discovered in its

⁴⁸ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 24.

⁴⁹ LOUD (2002), p. 178. Gero Dolezalek pointed out that William II may also have used this time strategically to renew his political status, as this was a period when the papacy was weak.

⁵⁰ BAUER (2004), pp. 88–89.



Fig. 102: Detail of the cuffs, arm-bands and outer breast-panel of the alb.

embroidered right cuff and both arm-bands show that these richly embroidered bands belonged to an earlier garment, which must have been taken apart and reassembled, perhaps under William I (r. 1154–1166).⁵¹ In addition, as we have seen, an ancient breast-panel on purple-dyed silk was discovered underneath the present one, which is usually ascribed to Frederick II (r. 1198–1250), also on stylistic grounds (Fig. 103).⁵² We know that the inscribed hem, on the other hand, was produced under William II in 1181. The alb was clearly then assembled from textiles produced under different Norman and Hohenstaufen rulers. We may, of course, ask whether this assemblage was simply a result of practical factors – specifically, the availability of these textiles in the royal treasury. My answer would be no. In fact, Frederick II's eagerness to display his strong connection to previous Norman kings may be cautiously used to support Bauer's stylistic arguments in favour of an attribution of the alb and stockings' assembled textiles to different periods of Norman and Hohenstaufen rule.

Like an archive, the different parts of the alb documented the origins of its wearer's authority and provided a symbolic representation of the permanence of the Sicilian kingdom. As can be derived from the inventories of two Ifriqiyan church treasures, compiled in Palermo in the mid-twelfth century, there was a distinct awareness

⁵¹ AL-SAMMAN (1982), p. 14. Al-Samman suggests that this would have occurred in 1156. Conf. chapter 1, 1.1.2.

⁵² BAUER (2004), cat. 68.



Fig. 103: Embroidered ancient breast-panel of the alb, purple-dyed silk.

of the age of textiles.⁵³ In fact, the evidence from these inventories, as well as the use of ‘textile relics’ observable on the alb, suggests that ancient textiles may have been especially esteemed and treasured. Many garments of the inventories are referred to as ancient (*vetus*); one chasuble is described as having a more ancient part around its neck, and some of the textiles are so old that they are actually torn, yet they continued to be kept in the treasury.⁵⁴ Given this evidence from a source nearly contemporary to the production of the alb’s different textile parts, we may assume that the alb as

⁵³ DOLEZALEK (2013), p. 101.

⁵⁴ ‘*Est casubla diaspri habens vetus aurum frisium circa collum;*’ ‘*Est unum palium magnum nimis vetus et per partes ruptum habens litteras saracenicas ex uno latere*’ (items 18 and 36 of the inventory of the church of Saint Nicholas in Mahdiyya). BRESCH (1998), p. 365. The fact that silk textiles – even old ones – were esteemed for their commercial value is evident. Other reasons why old textiles may have been kept and used in medieval church treasuries include, for example, the (fake) authentication of relics. Kristin BÖSE, Spürbar und unvergänglich: Zur Visualität, Ikonologie und Medialität von Textilien und textilen Reliquiaren im mittelalterlichen Reliquienkult, in: Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft 33 (2007), pp. 7–27. Hanns Hubach’s study of Sigismund Meisterlin’s *Epistola de tapcijs antiquis* shows, moreover, that old tapestries could be used to constitute fictitious pedigrees for the foundation of monasteries (forthcoming publication).

a whole could have been perceived as a composite garment, one that united textiles from the reigns of different rulers.

Displaying continuity and stability in their political authority was important for all Norman kings. For their successor Frederick II (1194–1250), moreover, demonstrating political continuity and parading his descent from the Norman kings of Sicily was a vitally important step in asserting his authority over the Norman kingdom.⁵⁵ Naturally, such an image of political stability and dynastic continuity would have relied upon the display of a selective memory of the past, extracted from a rather more complex reality. For Frederick II, claiming continuity concretely meant erasing the memory of William II's direct successors, Tancred (r. 1189–1194) and William III (r. 1194), kings of Sicily during the struggle for power from which Henry VI of Hohenstaufen (Frederick II's father) emerged victorious. For example, Frederick II ordered the destruction of all castles, fortifications and towers built after the death of his cousin William II which might have acted as reminders of the struggle and obscured the 'direct' lineage of his political power.⁵⁶ Even towards the end of Frederick II's reign, the public display of its continuity with the Norman dynasty seems to have been deemed important. Frederick II's famous *Constitutions of Melfi*, promulgated in 1231, for example, are based on – and explicitly quote from – the laws of his Norman predecessors.⁵⁷ The same can be said for the public inscription from 1250 mentioned above, which appears to have been set up in Palermo Cathedral to confirm a number of privileges issued by the Norman predecessors of Frederick II (Fig. 104).⁵⁸

Reusing textiles from the Norman treasury and incorporating them into his own regalia may have been a means to document continuity visually, but also to proclaim the legitimacy of his accession to the Sicilian throne. Perhaps Frederick II's eagerness to display his strong connection to previous Norman kings may thus be cautiously used to support Bauer's stylistic arguments in favour of an attribution of the alb and stockings' assembled textiles to different periods of Sicilian rule – including that of Frederick II. It is, of course, debatable whether standing up to the papal authority in

⁵⁵ The idea of the '*complexe d'infériorité archivistique*' and the importance of antiquity in the validation of power structures is discussed in Sylvie DENOIX, Bruno GALLAND, *La constitution des corpus archivistiques dans l'occident médiéval*, in: Publications de la Sorbonne, *L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge* (Orient - Occident), Paris 2009, pp. 239–61. Various perspectives on the court of Frederick II are provided in William TRONZO (ed.), *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen* (Studies in the History of Art 44, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, Symposium Papers XXIV, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC), Washington 1994.

⁵⁶ LOUD (2002), p. 152; James M. POWELL, *The Liber Augustalis or Constitutions of Melfi Promulgated by the Emperor Frederick II for the Kingdom of Sicily*, Syracuse NY 1971, p. 125: *Constitutions III*, XXXII–11.

⁵⁷ Book I of the *Constitutions of Melfi* contains seventy-six constitutions, sixty of them promulgated by Frederick II, five by Roger II, and eleven by William I or II. See *ibid.*, p. XIX.

⁵⁸ UNDIEMI (2010), p. 15.



Fig. 104: Marble plaque listing privileges granted by Frederick II, 1250, Palermo Cathedral.

garments with Arabic inscriptions was an inspired choice for Frederick II, whom the Pope accused of being a heretic and of being too close to the ‘Saracens’.⁵⁹ However, projecting an image of continuity would have been useful for all Norman rulers and for their successors, not only with regards to the papacy, but also in terms of the conflicting factions within the local Sicilian population.

⁵⁹ Francesco GABRIELI, Frederick II and Moslem Culture, in: *East and West* 9 (1958), pp. 55–57.

Conclusion

This study has drawn on different art historical fields and historical disciplines, combining facts and methods to provide a novel view on the royal garments from Norman Sicily. The particular focus here was on their Arabic inscriptions, which I studied with regards to their function. This approach to the study of ornament was a means to shift the emphasis away from considerations of their style and origins, which are encountered more frequently in studies concerned with movements of transfer across cultural boundaries, and towards a strictly contextual analysis using different inter-related frames. What I was interested in was to think about the choices that led to the use of a transcultural ornament in a particular context, and about the meanings this ornament carried both at the time of its production and of its later reception. Although the material evidence from Norman Sicily upon which this study is based remains limited, the phenomenon of Arabic inscriptions on the twelfth-century Sicilian garments certainly deserved further consideration and, above all, a more thorough contextualisation in the frames of Latin and Arabic court cultures, as well as in Norman Sicily itself.

The frames I have used to analyse the Arabic textile inscriptions from Norman Sicily focused on different aspects of the production and reception of this type of ornament in specific contexts. Considering the Norman mantle, for example, in the contextual frame of Latin court culture showed that its Arabic inscription did not derive purely from a formal appreciation of an Arab courtly aesthetic as a conveyor of status. The literary form of the mantle's inscription carries strong political connotations. Moreover, its layout on the garment and its different aesthetic dimensions, including sound, strongly suggest that the inscription was far more than meaningless form. This led to the question how the mantle's inscription may have related to contemporary Arabic court culture, and thus to an additional contextual frame. Looking at the mantle's inscription from a comparative perspective, with a special focus on contemporary Arabic textile inscriptions from Fatimid Egypt, confirmed its political function. However, the comparison also underlined differences and the uniqueness of the mantle's inscription. Asking about the choices underlying the form and textual content of the mantle's inscription, by means of a more specifically local contextualisation, has therefore provided a necessary complement to the previous approaches.

Using this contextualising framework, briefly summarised above with the example of Roger II's mantle, the first part of this book was concerned with determining the distinctiveness of the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions within Latin court culture, but also within Arabic court culture and more particularly that of Fatimid Egypt, with which the arts of Norman Sicily are often associated. The highly individual character of the Norman textiles acted as a prompt to investigate the adaptation of this particular Arabic ornamental motif to Norman Sicily. Consequently, the last part of the book, with its focus on the reigns of Roger II and William II, sought to provide

a demonstration of the variability of the functions and connotations of this ornament – these depended upon the contexts in which it was used.

To contextualise the phenomenon of Arabic textile inscriptions in the political environment of the Norman court, this case study of the Norman royal garments had to extend far beyond the traditional reach of European art history as a discipline. Through the inclusion of fields such as Islamic art history, but also legal, epigraphic and administrative history, I hope to have shown that an interdisciplinary approach not only refines art historical interpretation, but also that – in turn – concrete object analysis may serve other historical disciplines as a source for the study of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. Before concluding in more general terms, I would like to give a final summary of the main arguments and theses that I have put forward in this study.

First, the Arabic inscriptions on the Norman textiles appear to have been largely ignored until the eighteenth century. By then, they were perceived as incongruous within Latin aesthetics and interpreted as visual testimonies of Christian superiority and Muslim submission. While such culturally biased and generalising interpretations have, of course, been superseded by more specific analyses, I have argued that historical and art historical interpretations of Arabic inscriptions in European contexts have remained – to varying extents – indebted to this historical conception, especially in terms of their understanding of Arabic as an element foreign to European aesthetics and, more specifically, as a marker of the Islamic religion. This is a reductive assumption which, as I have shown throughout, takes into account neither the complexity of medieval societies, nor the fact that not all Arabic speakers were – or are – Muslims. Although textiles with Arabic inscriptions circulated widely throughout medieval Europe, the need to explain the perceived incongruousness of Arabic forms in Christian contexts has remained: I would even suggest that it has motivated most art historical studies of such textiles, including the present one.

Recent approaches to transcultural ornament as part of a pan-Mediterranean courtly aesthetic allow for interpretations that reach across the disciplinary divide between Islamic and European art history and the conventional boundaries of Islamic and Christian cultures. The notion of a shared Mediterranean court culture, for example, allows for interpretations of the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions as transcultural forms appreciated for their status across and beyond these boundaries and the Mediterranean shores. However, although some uses of Arabic written ornament in Latin – and also in Arabic contexts – may have been based on a purely formal appreciation, this is emphatically not the only explanation for the use of Arabic ornamental inscriptions on the Norman textiles. Although the Norman textile inscriptions doubtless had an important visual function, much attention was also paid to the readability of the inscriptions on Norman textiles and, in the case of the mantle, even to their sound.

The inscriptions are small and were probably especially difficult to decipher when the garments were worn, but they are no mere pseudo-script: the letters are clearly traced, while the wording is elaborate and does not consist, for example, of

repetitions of generic good wishes. As I have argued, therefore, we need to discard the idea that Arabic inscriptions in Norman Sicily can be appreciated in purely formal terms as eye-catching, prestigious shapes. I have shown, moreover, that the shared taste and movements of transfer that occasioned the diffusion of ornamental motifs and the methodological frames associated with these notions are unable to account for the choices underlying the use of a transcultural ornament in a specific context. Yet, as is evident from the comparison of Norman and Fatimid textiles in this study, the use of Arabic textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily is based on a selective reception of this type of ornament from the Arab Mediterranean and on its transformation and adaptation to the Norman court.

To specify which aspects of the use of textile inscriptions in Arab court culture were adopted at the Norman court and which others discarded, I have proposed to complement the concepts of shared court culture and transfer, through which the inscriptions were previously observed, with a comparison of inscribed textiles in Norman Sicily and Fatimid Egypt, considering the circumstances of their production, as well as their styles, contents and functions. Textile inscriptions in both contexts can be counted as public inscriptions as they were issued or commissioned by the court and played a clear role in the courts' political idioms. So one aspect which appears of the utmost importance on both sides of the comparison is the political function of textile inscriptions. The use of Arabic textile inscriptions on the Norman garments ought to be read against the background of an awareness at the Norman court of the political functions of Arabic inscriptions in Arab courts. Yet differences in the production, appearance and uses of textile inscriptions in both contexts are also clear.

One issue that had to be addressed on the Norman side of the comparison was the question of who produced the Sicilian garments and the artisans' indebtedness to Byzantine or Islamic artistic traditions. Monneret de Villard's thesis was that Byzantine artisans were responsible for silk weaving in the Norman textile workshops, whereas Arabs would work as embroiderers. A closer look at various textiles attributed to Norman Sicily, as well as at written sources, such as the handwritten notes which were discovered in the sleeves of the alb, have shown matters to be more complex. In the Norman workshops, the traditions brought in from diverse regions of the medieval Mediterranean were entangled.

However, what could be made out very clearly from the comparison of the Norman textile workshop as it appears in the historical sources with the circumstances of textile production in Fatimid Egypt is that there was no Norman textile institution comparable to the Fatimid *ṭirāz* institution. The courtly production of inscribed textiles in Sicily seems to have taken place on a more restricted scale in the Palermitan *khizāna*, which is mentioned as a place of textile production in the inscriptions of the Norman mantle and alb. Hence, unlike in Fatimid Egypt, textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily were not used as standardised tools for political propaganda. This is a major difference and a rather surprising one, because the Norman kings very clearly used Arabic inscriptions, both monumental and textile, as an important medium for

the public display of authority. Further important differences between Fatimid and Norman textile traditions can be noted in the styles and textual contents of the textile inscriptions. It is evident that in Norman Sicily, textile inscriptions as ornamental motifs were not merely copied from contemporary Arabic examples in circulation in the medieval Mediterranean, for instance those originating from Fatimid Egypt. Instead, they underwent a number of transformations in the course of their transfer to the Sicilian court. As is shown in the second part of this study, the choices underlying the adoption and adaptation of this type of ornament were motivated by the specific political requirements of the Norman monarchy.

Referring to Norman public writing and royal ceremonies, I have argued – along Metcalfe and Johns's lines – that Norman trilingualism and the important role of Arabic within the three official idioms are to be understood as intentional projections by the Norman court, rather than passive reflections of Norman society.¹ This implies that the use of Arabic textile inscriptions was an active choice, one which was not necessarily dictated by the origin of the artisans or the intended recipients. Nor was the use of Arabic inscriptions a mere relic of the island's Arabic past or a result of its contacts with Arabs elsewhere. The Arabic language was consciously chosen in public inscriptions for its appropriateness to Norman royal representation. The phenomenon of multilingualism in Norman Sicily and the choice of inscribing specific languages for specific functions is one that would – in a further study – benefit from a comparison with regions such as medieval Iberia or the Caucasus, where inscriptions in several languages were also juxtaposed.

In the analysis of public inscriptions in Norman Sicily a distinction ought to be made between production and reception, and between the different aesthetic dimensions of the acts of seeing and reading on which the inscriptions rely. While these aesthetic dimensions coexist at all times, the concentration of the viewer on one of them depends on the context in which the objects are viewed and on the viewer's ability to recognise a written ornament as something potentially legible. The Norman textile inscriptions were produced as legible documents, though ones that did not necessarily have to be read. Reading the Arabic inscriptions and knowing their content was important at some stages of the production and reception of the Norman garments. At other stages, their content ought to be considered instead largely irrelevant, and this applies not only during the later reception of the garments, but already in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sicily.

So one might wonder what the relevance is for the function of an inscription whether an inscription is legible or, on the other hand, illegible or invisible and thus deprived of its linguistic message. Inscriptions function through various aesthetic dimensions, including form, materiality and sound.² As various written sources

¹ METCALFE (2002), p. 303.

² See contributions to EASTMOND (2015) and Anthony Eastmond's own conclusion to this volume.

show, the Norman palace, in which the royal garments would probably have been kept, was open to foreign visitors and diplomatic delegations, who may well have been invited to admire objects representative of the Norman kings' splendour. They could have seen and read the inscriptions, or heard them being read. Another occasion for the reception of the Arabic textile inscriptions would have been provided by royal ceremony, during which the kings' garments would have been seen by a varied public, probably including the people of Palermo, but not necessarily read. The focus on reception, on the accessibility – and hence on the visibility – of the royal garments in Norman Palermo showed that the Arabic textile inscriptions did not carry a single message, but that the function and meaning of this ornament varied according to the context.

Any attempt to clarify the choices underlying the distinctive aspects of the form, content and function of Norman textile inscriptions at the level of their production, on the other hand, benefits hugely from a consideration of the political concerns of the Norman kings. To show the complexity of choices underlying the use of Arabic inscriptions in Norman Sicily, I have referred to the reigns of Roger II and William II separately, arguing that the same type of ornament was used to serve different functions, depending on the political fields within which the public image of the kings was devised. These would have comprised the relationships between the Normans and the Sicilian population, including the nobility and clergy, and between the Normans and the papacy and other Mediterranean powers. So whom did the Arabic inscriptions mean to address? Were they aimed at Muslim viewers, or made by Muslim craftsmen? Were they devised to foster, or indeed express, political consent to Norman rule? The focus on context, both in terms of the production and the reception of Arabic textile inscriptions in Norman Sicily and the two final case studies of the mantle and alb, show that there cannot be an overarching, general answer to these questions.

The case studies situate the Norman Arabic textile inscriptions within the frame of two particular types of public writing at the service of the Norman court: epigraphy and legal documents. Both types are closely related. However, although correspondences can be shown between Norman epigraphy and administration – particularly in the production of multilingual texts – it is difficult to argue that the development of the Norman administration and epigraphic programme, including the textile inscriptions, was an entirely coordinated one. In fact, much of the remaining epigraphic evidence is in Arabic, but the Norman chancery's output of Arabic documents was minute in comparison with the number in Latin and Greek. This 'Arabic facet' has, nonetheless, proven worthy of special attention and the Norman import of administrative knowledge from the Fatimid chancery at the outset of the Norman kingdom, as Johns has shown, was clearly the result of a specific choice.³ So while the Arabic facet of Norman courtly display was certainly no random relic of the past, but the

3 JOHNS (2002).

result of an active and conscious act of appropriation, I have also argued in favour of a medium-specific evolution in the epigraphy which derives its rationale from continuity.

Studying Roger II's mantle in the context of its production in the early period of the Norman kingdom, I have drawn attention to this object's embeddedness in the local context. The mantle's Kufic inscription with its antiquated style appears firmly anchored in a local Sicilian tradition. This can also be said – though with less certainty – about the lining of the mantle. However, the evidence presently available does not allow firmer conclusions to be drawn: the available material and written evidence of continuities in Sicilian artistic production is scarce and much work remains to be done. The study of the architectural heritage of pre-Norman, pre- and post-1130 Norman Sicily, and southern Italy would seem particularly important here. Nevertheless, tracing continuities across the political changes of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries is an important step towards better understanding the choices underlying the self-construed image of the Norman court.

The reasons for the use of an antiquated Kufic style and – possibly – ancient, or ancient-looking, tapestries on Roger II's garment are twofold. On the one hand, they stand for a medium-specific continuity across political change in both epigraphy and textile production. This is a practical continuity which ought to be ascribed to the availability of craftsmen and materials. On the other hand, however, the recourse to a pre-Norman style on the mantle also serves to project the image of a political continuity which was not historically given. This political choice can be best understood when the mantle is set within the political tensions that produced it. The Normans were newcomers, Roger II a newly made king with no dynastic line to reinforce his claim to power. His appropriation of an established language of authority – the Kufic script on the mantle – which would then be subjected to the visual idiom of the new rulers – the Latin shape of the garment – would have been a powerful visual statement of his political strength.

Focusing on the textile inscriptions from the period of William II, and particularly on the Norman alb, the last chapter, on the other hand, focused on parallels between legal documents and textile inscriptions, and argued that the alb's bilingual inscription had a specific legal function. Of course, legal documents from the Norman chancery and the royal garment derive from different intellectual and indeed practical traditions. Nevertheless, what they share is a function in the 'performance' of legitimating royalty. Garments in general played an important part in royal ceremony and can thus be seen as having held specific functions in the performance of legal acts, such as investitures. The Norman alb in particular, however, appears to have been produced and perceived as a transmitter of legal content by means of its inscription, its materiality and its anchoring within Norman legal tradition. The embroidered hem with its repetitive content, for instance, can be considered a sign of public assent to the wearer's legitimacy, while the date of its production – 1181 – probably ought to be related to the political tension with the papacy.

Extending the study of the alb's legal function to include also the reign of the Hohenstaufen ruler Frederick II, heir to the Norman kingdom of Sicily, brought back the issue of continuity across political change, previously addressed with regards to Roger II's mantle. The alb is a composite garment assembled from pieces of different periods; a look at contemporary sources, in which garments are classified according to their age, confirms that the alb would most probably also have been perceived as such.⁴ From Frederick II's perspective, reusing textiles from the Norman treasury would have provided a means to document continuity visually, and indeed to proclaim the legitimacy of his accession to the Sicilian throne. As a textile archive, the alb visually documents the lineage of its wearer and thus provides a symbolic representation of political permanence across the Norman and Hohenstaufen dynasties.

Given the close relationship between the Normans and the papacy, I proposed a reading of the garments with a particular emphasis on this political frame. Of course, considering the use of textile inscriptions on the mantle and alb as transmitters of legal authority in any one political field is an artificial means of seeking clarification through separation – the relations between the Norman kings and their local population, between the kings and the papacy, and within the larger Mediterranean would have naturally been intertwined. In terms of Roger II's mantle, nevertheless, both continuity with the political language of pre-Norman Sicily and the importation of a contemporary language of authority recognised in the Islamic Mediterranean could effectively have contributed to reinforcing the projection of an ideal Norman royalty. Facing the Sicilian population and ruling nobility, the newly proclaimed king would have been confronted with the need to justify the legitimacy of Norman rule and to leave no doubt as to his authority. An interpretation of the alb, on the other hand, as a visual demonstration of continuity elucidates the date of the hem as well as the legal dimension of its bilingual inscription in Arabic and Latin. And the fact that the garment itself is a document assembled from differently dated textiles is a visual testimony to the dynastic origins of the authority of Norman and Hohenstaufen rulers.

To return to the question that began this study: Arabic script on Christian kings? The eighteenth-century scholar von Murr claimed that Arabic inscriptions on the Norman garments were presented to the Norman king by 'humiliated Saracens'. The limitations of this assumption have become more than obvious. Arabic textile inscriptions were not incongruous in the courtly language of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Sicily. Instead, they were well established as integral parts of Sicilian royal representation, as markers of continuity and self-affirmation. By positioning this transcultural ornament within different contextual frames, I have underlined both the variability of the functions of this type of ornament and the distinctive features of its use in Norman Sicily. Focusing on the differences between the Norman and contemporary artistic traditions has made it possible to pinpoint the choices underly-

⁴ DOLEZALEK (2013), p. 101; BRESK (1998), pp. 362–66.

ing the adoption and adaptation of Arabic textile inscriptions at the Sicilian court. An explanation for these choices was sought in the political preoccupations of the Norman kings. As newcomers and royal '*parvenus*'⁵ at the centre of the Mediterranean networks of trade and diplomacy, the Norman kings adopted a Mediterranean language of political representation, projecting an image of authority, legitimacy and independence.

Throughout this study, I have used 'transcultural' to describe an ornament which was used in regions under Islamic and Christian rule alike and thus crosses – and questions – conventionally established cultural boundaries. The term also refers to movements of interchange across the shores of the medieval Mediterranean and to the methods of current art history, in which transcultural and global concerns are growing more and more important. However, the presence of Arabic inscriptions on the garments of the kings of Sicily is not only testimony to transcultural entanglements, to the mobility of forms, objects, craftsmen and ideas between Arab and Latin, Islamic and Christian regions and cultures. This case study also allows us to question and rethink fundamentally such conventional boundaries by drawing attention to historical complexity and discursive simplification. In fact, I believe that the format of the case study is particularly apt to this work. It not only provides a means to tie down transcultural phenomena to a concrete frame, but it also is an important way forward in order to test, develop and refine the more theoretical considerations of transcultural and global history proposed in the recent literature. I have conceived this case study as a plea for contextualisation, and for an analysis of the embeddedness of objects and phenomena in their varying social contexts, which I consider to be an essential step forward in transcultural art historical discourse.

In considering the circulation of forms between Latin and Arab cultures in the medieval Mediterranean, the present argument manifestly inscribes itself within the general context of an increased interest in Islamic and Christian interrelations. This has been especially pronounced in the last two decades, in which political circumstances have led to an ever-growing discursive trend to construe 'Islam' and 'the West' as distinct and mutually exclusive entities.⁶ This book joins the multitude of voices that have recently spoken out against this overly simplified conception of cultures and considers boundaries as flexible conceptual constructs which reflect current categories, rather than necessarily offering an insight into the nature and self-definition of medieval – and present – societies.

⁵ The term is borrowed from DELL'ACQUA (2003/4).

⁶ For a critical analysis of recent discursive constructions of 'Islam and the West' as antagonistic cultural entities, see, for example, Jessica WINEGAR *The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror*, in: *Anthropological Quarterly* 81/3 (2008), pp. 651–81.

Appendix

Mantle: Embroidered Hem¹

مما عمل با لخزانة الملكية المعمورة با لسعد و الا جلال والجد والكمال
والطول والافضال والقبول والاقبال والسماحة والجلال والفخر والجمال وبلوغ
الاماني والامال وطيب الايام والليال بلا زوال ولا انتقال بالعز والدعاية
والحفظ والحماية والسعد والسلامة والنصر والكفاية بمدينة صقلية سنة ثمان
وعشرين وخمسمائة

*Mimmā ‘umila bi-l-khizānat | al-malakīya al-ma‘mūra | bi-l-sa’d wa-l-ijlāl | wa-l-jadd wa-l-kamāl
| wa-l-ṭūl wa-l-afḍāl | wa-l-qabūl wa-l-iqbāl | wa-l-samāḥa wa-l-jalāl | wa-l-fakhr wa-l-jamāl | wa-
bulūgh al-amān(i?) wa-l-āmāl | wa-ṭīb al-ayyām wa-l-layāl | bi-lā zawāl wa-lā intiqāl | bi-l-‘izz wa-l-
di‘āya | wa-l-ḥifẓ wa-l-ḥimāya | wa-l-sa’d wa-l-salāma | wa-l-naṣr wa-l-kifāya | bi-madīnat Ṣiqillīya |
sana thamān wa-‘ishrīn wa-khamsmī’a*

Of what was made in the *khizāna* (treasury), inhabited by happiness and glory, good fortune and perfection, and long (life) and merits, and welcome and prosperity, and generosity and splendour, and glory and beauty, and realisation of desires (?) and hopes, and delights of days and nights, without end and without modification, with might and care, and sponsorship and protection, and happiness and well-being, and triumph and sufficiency. In the city of Sicily, in the year 528.

Alb: Embroidered Orphrey²

*+ OPERATU(M) F[ELI]CI. VRBE PANORMI. XV. ANNO REGNI D(OMI)NI. W(ILLELMI). D(E I.
GR(ATIA) REGIS SICILIE DVCAT(VS). APVLIE ET PRINCIPAT(VS) CAP(VE). FILII REGIS
W(ILLELMI) INDICTIO(N)E XIII.*

Made in the felicitous city of Palermo, in the fifteenth year of the reign of William, king of Sicily by the grace of God, of the duchy of Apulia, the principality of Capua, son of King William. In the fourteenth indiction.

¹ I would like to thank Regula Forster for her invaluable help with the Arabic transcriptions and translations. For alternative English translations of the inscription, as well as some grammatical details, see GRABAR (2005), p. 39; JOHNS (2006), p. 327. The markings of the rhymes with dashes were adopted from Johns.

² BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 68, p. 269; AL-SAMMAN (1982), pp. 19–22.

مما أمر بعمله الملك المعظم غياالم الثاني المستعز بالله المعتضد بقدرته
المستنصر بقوته مالك ايطاليه وانكبرده وقلوريه و صقليه معز إمام ر[و]ميه
الناصر للملة النصرانيه بخزائنه المعمورة بدوام العز من تاريخ (...) الرابع عشر
سنة الف و مائة [و] واحد و ثمانين لتاريخ سيدنا يسوع المسيح

*Mimmā amara bi-‘amalihi al-malik al-mu‘azzam Ghuliyālm al-thānī al-musta‘izz bi-llah,
al-mu‘taḍid bi-qudratihi, al-mustanṣir bi-qūwatihi mālik Iṭāliya wa-Ankuburda wa-Qalūriya
wa-Ṣiqilliya, mu‘izz imām R(ū)mīya, al-nāṣir li-l-milla al-naṣrāniya, bi-khizānatihi al-ma‘mūra
bi-dūwām al-‘izz min ta’riḥ (ūliyān?) al-rābi‘ ‘ashr sana alf wa mi’a (wa-) wāḥid wa-thamānīn
li-ta’riḥ sayyidinā Yasū‘ al-masiḥ.*

From what ordered to be made the magnificent King William the second, honoured through God, supported through His power, victorious through His force, ruler of Italy and Apulia and Calabria and Sicily, supporter of the Imam of Rumiya, protector of the Christian faith, in his plentiful *khizāna* (chamber, treasury) of lasting glory, in the time of the 14th Ulian (?), in the year 1181 of the time of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

Alb: Handwritten Notes in Sleeves³

From the right arm-band:

هذا أول الثلث الذي عمله مح

Hadhā awwal al-thulth alladhī ‘amilahū Muḥ... / Maḥ [...?].

This is the beginning of the third which Mḥ [... / Muḥsin?] made [...]

From the left arm-band:

هذا الثلث الذي عمله علي المالطي دجله من اللؤلؤ على يد القائد دميان
رجع من ذلك عند فتقه وتكليله ثاني كرّة على يد الفني طوماس بتاريخ (١٢)
[مايو الرابع]

*Hadhā al-thulth alladhī ‘amilahū ‘Ālī l-Mālṭī dajjalahū min al-lu‘lu‘ ‘alā yad al-qā’id Damiy[ān...],
raja‘ min dhālik ‘ind fatqihī wa taklīlīhī thānī karra ‘alā yad al-fannī Ṭūmās bi-ta’riḥ 12 Mā[yū...]*

³ For slightly divergent transcriptions and translations of the inscriptions, see JOHNS (2006), pp. 330–31. First Arabic transcription, translation and discussion of the notes in AL-SAMMAN (1982), pp. 12–19.

This is the third that 'Alī of Maḷṭa made, he covered it with pearls on the order of the overseer Damiyan. He did that again [restarted in that respect, i.e. covered it again in pearls] when it was unsewn and decorated the second time, on order of the artisan Ṭūmas on the (12th of...)

From the right cuff:

هذا الثالث الذي عمله مرزوق دجله من اللؤلؤ على يد القائد دميان تسعين
درهم رجع من ذلك عند فتنه وتكليله ثاني كربة بتاريخ ١٢ مايو الرابع على يد
الفني طوماس تسع خرب

Hadhā al-thulth alladhī 'amilahū Marzūq dajjalahū min al-lu'lu' 'alā yad al-qā'id Damiyān tis'in dirham, raja' min dhālik 'ind fatqihī wa-taklilīhī thānī karra bi-ta'rikh 12 Māyū l-rābi' 'alā yad al-fannī Ṭūmās tis' khurab.

This third that Marzūq made, he covered it with pearls on order of the overseer (?) Damiyan. Ninety dirhams [of pearls were used]. He did that again [restarted in that respect, i.e. covered it again in pearls] when it [= the third] was unsewn and decorated the second time, on the 12th May of the fourth [indiction?] on order of the artisan Ṭūmas. Nine pearls [?] were pierced.

Stockings: Tapestry-Woven⁴

Al-Samman's transcription of the inscription at the top of the right stocking (h. 7 cm) is as follows (Fig. 25a):

برسم الملك المعظم القدس غليالم

Bi-rasm al-malik al-mu'azzam al-quḍus Ghuliyālm.

For the king, the glorious, holy William.

المستعز با(ل)له(ه) ال[م]عتز(ضد) بقدرته(لم)ستتصر بق[وته]

Al-musta'izz bi-llāh al-[m]u'ta(ḍid) bi-quḍratihī a(l-m)ustanṣir bi-q[ūwatihī]

The one who is honoured by God, supported by His power, victorious through His strength.

⁴ AL-SAMMAN, pp. 25–31.

Sword Belt: Tablet-Woven⁵

CRISTVS RIEGNAT CRISTVS INQPARAT DEVS

Christ reigns, Christ governs, God.

Hugo Falcandus' Description of the Palatial Textile Workshop⁶

Nec vero nobiles illas palatio adherents silentio preteriri convenit officinas, ubi in fila variis distincta coloribus serum vellera tenuantur et sibi invicem multiplici texendi genere coaptantur. Hinc enim videas amita, dimitaque et triamita minori peritia sumptuque perfici; hinc et examita uberioris materie copia condensari; hinc diarodon igneo fulgore visum reverberat; hic diapisti color subviridis intuentium oculis grato blanditur aspectu; hic exarentasmata circulum varietatibus insignita, maiorem quidem artificum industriam et materie ubertatem desiderant, maiori nichilominus pretio distrahenda. Multa quidem et alia videas ibi varii coloris ac diversi generis ornamenta in quibus et sericis aurum intexitur, et multiformis picture varietas gemmis interlucentibus illustratur. Margarite quoque, aut integre cistulis aureis includuntur, aut perforate filo tenui connectuntur et eleganti quadam dispositionis industria picturati, iubentur formam operis exhibere.

Nor is it appropriate to pass over in silence the high-quality workshops which belong to the palace, where the threads of silkworms are spun most finely into separate threads of different colours before being knitted together to make multiple strands. Here you can see how single-stranded [*amita*],⁷ double-stranded and triple-stranded thread is finished with less skill and expense; and there six-stranded thread is pressed together using richer material; here the red thread meets your eyes with the gleam of fire, and there the colour of green thread gives pleasure to the eyes of onlookers with its pleasant aspect; over there damask cloth marked by circles of different kinds requires greater application from the craftsmen and richness of raw material, and is consequently finished at greater cost. You may see many other adornments of different colours and types there, among them gold threaded into the silk, and a variety of different-shaped representations made by sparkling gems. Pearls too, either complete ones encased in gold, or perforated ones strung together on a thread and engraved

⁵ Slightly different reading in the *Nobiles Officinae catalogue* ('*Cristvs riehgnat*'). BAUER, in: *Nobiles Officinae* (2004), cat. 73, p. 281.

⁶ SIRAGUSA (1897), pp. 178–80; A letter concerning the Sicilian tragedy to Peter, Treasurer of the Church of Palermo, in: LOUD/WIEDEMANN, p. 259.

⁷ The explanation of the textile terminology proposed by Camillo Gallo differs slightly from Loud and Wiedemann's translation. Gallo's explanation of *amita*, *dimita*, *triamita* etc. as types of textiles appears more plausible to me that Loud/Wiedemann's translation as a reference to the type of thread, which I have nevertheless left unchanged here. GALLO (1788), pp. 180–83.

by means of some elegant work of arrangement, are made to demonstrate the level of craftsmanship.

Hugo Falcandus' Description of the Royal Palace⁸

Alterius vero lateris partem oppositam palatium Novum insedit, mira ex quadris lapidibus diligentia, miro labore constructum, exterius quidem spatiosis murorum anfractibus circumclusum, interius vero multo gemmarum auriq[ue] splendore conspicuum; hinc habens turrim Pisanam thesaurorum custodie deputatam, illinc turrim Grecam ei civitatis partique Kemonia dicitur imminentem. Medium vero locum pars illa palatii que Ioharia nuncupatur, plurimum habens decoris, illustrat, quam multiformis ornatus gloria prefulgentem rex ubi otio quietique indulgere voluerit, familiaris frequentare consuevit. Inde per reliquum spatium varie sunt circumquaque disposite mansiones matronis puellisq[ue] et eunuchis, qui regi regineq[ue] serviunt, deputate. Sunt et alia ibidem palatiola multo quidem decore nitentia, ubi rex aut de statu regni cum familiaribus suis secretius disserit, aut de publicis et maioribus regni negotiis locuturus procures introducit.

The New Palace sits on the opposite part of the other side, built with amazing effort and astonishing skill out of squared stones; the outer side has walls which wind far and wide, while the inner side is remarkable for its great splendour of gems and gold. On one side it has the Pisan Tower, assigned to the protection of the treasury, on the other the Greek Tower overlooks that part of the city which is called Kemonia. That part of the palace called Joharia glorifies the middle section; it is particularly beautiful, sparkling with the glory of many kinds of adornment, and the king used to spend his time there intimately when he wanted to enjoy peace and quiet. Over the rest of the site there are spread various mansions placed all around for the married ladies, the girls of the harem, and the eunuchs who are assigned to serve the king and queen. There are some other smaller palaces there, shining with great beauty, where the king either discusses the state of the realm in private with his *familiares*, or invites the powerful when he is going to talk about the great public affairs of the realm.

⁸ SIRAGUSA (1897), pp. 178–80. LOUD/WIEDEMANN (1998), pp. 258–59.

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